



Insider tips on
*running a program
targeting hard to
recycle items*

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 initiative that deals with hard to recycle items, 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
- Hard waste recovery
- Textile waste

Special waste streams

Special waste initiatives divert products that are not easily or traditionally recycled from landfill, for example, hard plastics, plastic grain bags, e-waste, shells from food waste, soap, and cigarette butts.

It is important to consider all of the following steps on your path to success. For special waste stream initiatives, we have highlighted specific key learnings that are worth further consideration, as they may provide more challenges and opportunities along the way.

Phase 1: scope and plan

Establish a baseline community need

Learn about your landscape by understanding your employees, volunteers, waste collection partners, and business partners who have a use for your waste in your target area. Find out their knowledge and buy-in of the circular economy ideals, and attitudes and behaviours to purchasing and recycling goods.

You will be in a better position to run a suitable program that matches skills with resources if you have an understanding about other organisations in this field and how you will differentiate yourself, or offer complementary services.

You should consider where your streams of waste are coming from, and how to get them to you. And you should understand the economics and logistics of collections to build a viable business model.

Plan your program

Think about what kind of activities will match your community's need. The CE insiders suggest that 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.

These are the kinds of things other specialised waste stream programs do:

Tick those that apply to your program

Arrange a collection system for waste that normally misses recycling bins (like cigarette butts, fishing lines and bottle tops). This key learning requires careful planning as it presents many challenges as well as opportunities.

Assess and sort items depending on end use.

Run workshops or a factory line production to turn material into new products, or divert to a manufacturer who will do this.

Run a store or a stall to sell items.

Send waste to partners to repurpose and process waste into a useful resource.



Set your boundaries

To help you refine the scope of your program the CE insiders recommend considering what capacity you have and need to run. Understand the equipment and facilities you can access. This will determine your business model.

You will also need to consider relevant industry requirements for your waste stream, for example, initiatives working with plastic food containers must comply with food safety standards.

Think about what sort of arrangement would work best for you. Whether you run pop up workshops or decide to run a permanent factory or warehouse, you should take into account:

- Space that is safe, usable, secure and accessible to the workers. The space needs to be well ventilated if working with certain wastes, such as plastics.
- Adequate and hygienic space to store collected waste.
- The preferences of your local demographics, and your location.
- Visible and accessible shopfront, if sales are part of your plan, including online or market stalls.
- The demand and need for specific end products.
- The availability of employees and volunteers.

Manage risk and maintain Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

Assess your risks

The CE insiders recommend you 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, the CE insiders recommend you 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

The aim of specialised waste recovery is to encourage behaviour change around waste. So it helps to think about how all aspects of your public interactions contribute to this goal.

Think about how to best showcase your work. You might sell your services through demonstrations and workshops, rather than selling your product. Some other programs also operate on membership fees, paid by people who want to use your equipment.



You could consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

- Teach people to value their waste and put it in the right receptacle.
- Educate the community about responsible waste management.
- Work with venues, retailers and manufacturers to adopt more sustainable processes so you can capture as much waste as possible.
- Change purchasing behaviour, i.e. buy smaller amounts and only use what you need.
- Attend community events to increase the awareness of your services.
- Use 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 usefulness and effectiveness in impacting behaviour change. This will also help you demonstrate your value to key stakeholders, including funders.

Phase 2: implement program

Run an efficient program

Most specialised waste recovery programs operate on thin margins, so careful administration of resources is important.

You might consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Building a streamlined system to assess waste as it arrives. This will minimise the pressure on your program.

Building a cost effective collection system that covers multiple venues that your workforce can manage.

Managing stakeholders and corporate partners to ensure relationships are equally productive.

Understanding your stakeholders and their needs.

Using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to communicate with your stakeholders. Not-for-profits can get discounts and/or free software products from Microsoft and Google.

A system to record by weight or volume the amount you are saving from landfill. This will demonstrate your value.

Developing a business and marketing plan, and a budget.

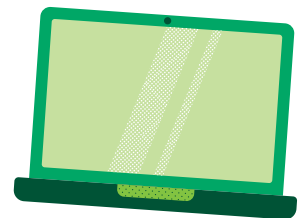


Look after your assets

Most programs also rely on specialist machinery to process their waste stream.

CE insiders say it's important to:

- Develop a good relationship with your machinery supplier.
- Recruit volunteers with relevant technical skills..
- Have maintenance schedules to avoid costly repairs.
- Be aware of what might void warranty in your core pieces of equipment.
- Design a streamlined process so that you get the right materials in the right form. For example, washing and sorting lids by hand is time consuming. Ask donors to donate their lids already washed.
- Get donors to 'value the resource' by working with an organisation that advocates for properly washing or filtering the waste.



Engage diverse communities

Consider the most appropriate platforms for your programs and whether or not you plan to target certain groups – different demographics use different media types. If you know the demographic profile of your local community you can improve information about events and disposing of waste effectively so it's accessible to groups like migrants and refugees.

Set your team up for success

CE insiders suggest you have clear position descriptions for volunteers that outline their roles, responsibilities and required skills. Ensure that staff and volunteers who run your program have the appropriate training and access to manuals and resources.

Think about your insurance requirements, and what workplace safety requirements you may need for your sewists and pickers when they select items. Think about the needs of your volunteers and staff who deal with donors and the people who receive goods, and what guidance they may require.

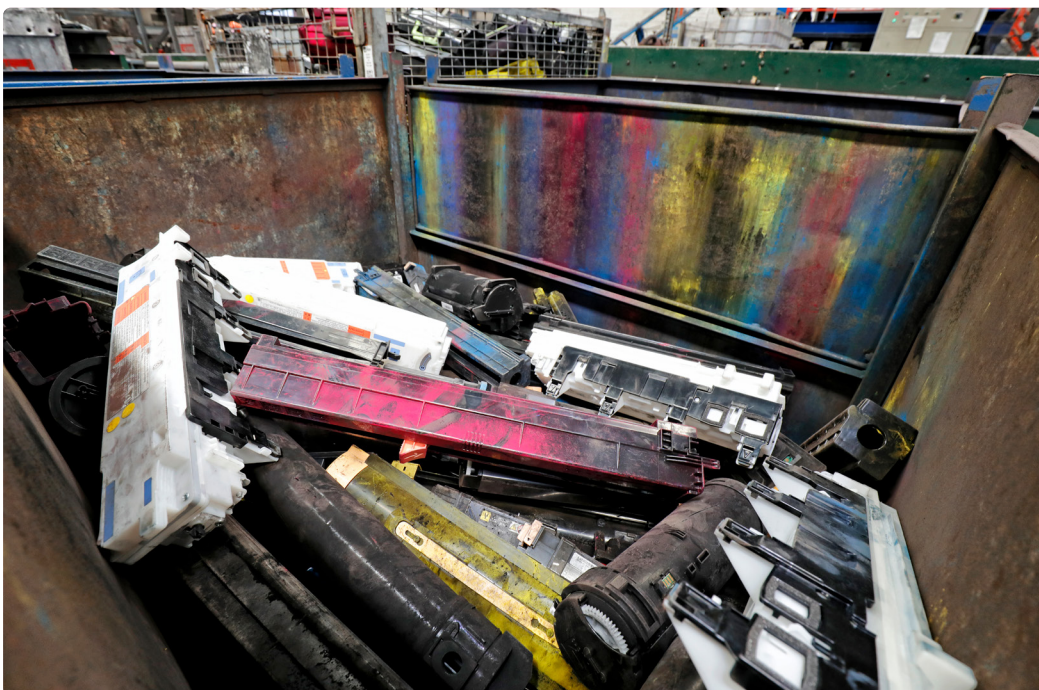
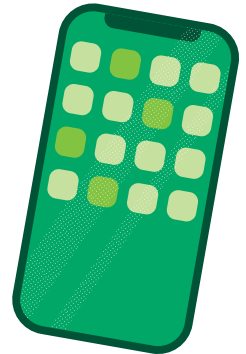
Circular collaboration

Special waste programs are more effective when they work together. Consider other special waste initiatives as a supportive and informative network that can help you achieve your shared circular goals.

Think about how you might be able to promote collaboration with each other, for example:

- Help each other with consistent messaging.
- Share knowledge of public event opportunities.
- Provide local support to broader education campaigns.

Your program will be much stronger and more likely to achieve results if you identify opportunities for partnership with existing organisations, such as local government, state government, schools, local retailers and manufacturers, op shops, and neighbourhood houses.



Phase 3: evaluation and improvements

Use your learnings to make improvements

Program managers do well when they think about how they might improve future practice. This might mean sharing knowledge gained during the day with your team or debriefing later 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 they can be repeated or applied elsewhere. Set up an easy to use document management system, so that everyone can all 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 special waste programs, so think about ways you can encourage this..

Tick those that apply to your program

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

Put a price on waste from donors, especially corporate donors.

Record data and track stock to communicate its value and show the quantity of goods you've saved from landfill.

Teach your volunteers and staff to write grant applications.

Set up ways to encourage donations.

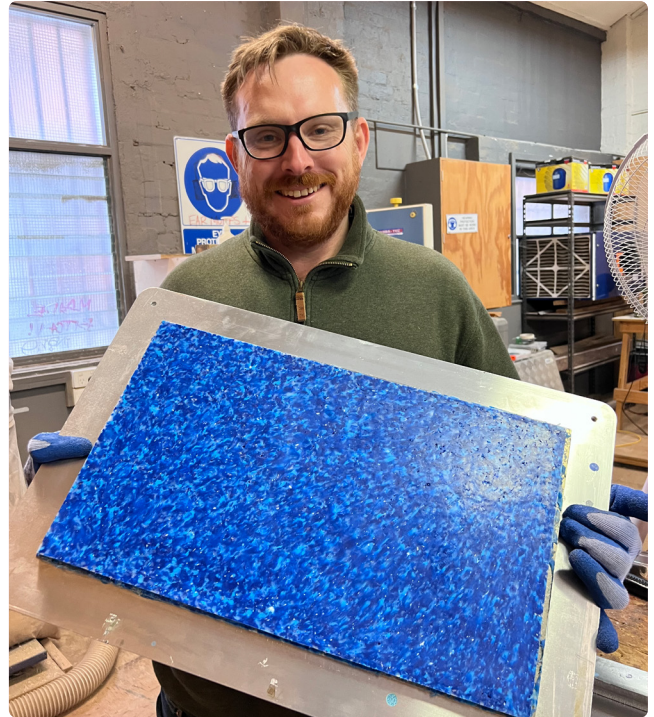
Set up a commercially viable product with a realistic price point.



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 activity can help you build your community and secure funding and resources for your program.

Jesuit Social Services'



The Jesuit Social Services' (JSS) Ecological Justice Hub partners with Precious Plastics to repurpose plastic bottle lids. JSS's Ecological Justice Hub CEO Bianca says, "The aim of our program is to demystify plastics. Participating in this program educates people about the energy and effort used to recycle, and why refusing is a better strategy. An even bigger and more transformative outcome is building peoples' confidence in their own ability to learn." Read more. <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/news/news-articles/community-group-creates-local-recycling-solutions-for-plastic-bottle-lids>