



Insider tips on
*running a repair
cafe 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 repair 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
- Food rescue and distribution
- Food waste organics/composting
- Hard waste recovery
- Textile waste
- Special waste streams

Repair hubs and cafes

Repair cafes (also called 'repair hubs or 'repair corners') are places where experts repair household items, share tools, and teach others repair skills to keep broken household items out of landfill. Repair hubs and cafes allow visitors to assess whether their items can be fixed by the experts or by themselves.

If you are considering starting your own community repair cafe, the circular economy (CE) insiders we spoke to for this guide suggest the following steps on the path to success.

Key learnings from our insiders are in green boxes – they are some of the trickier aspects of running a repair cafe that are worth deeper consideration because they may present more challenges and opportunities along the way.

Phase 1: scoping and planning

Establish baseline community need and capability

Learn about the landscape you'll be working in by understanding the volunteers, customers and repairers in your target area. Find out about their repair knowledge, buy-in to circular economy ideals, and attitudes and behaviours regarding repairing and consuming.

You'll be in a better position to design well-attended events if you understand your customers' ability to make their own repairs, as well as your volunteer repairers' skills to make repairs and teach repairing methods.

Plan your program

With a clear understanding of your landscape, you can think about what kind of activities you might want to run.

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 some of the activities other hubs/cafes have run:

- Pop-up repair events.
- Regular repair hub/cafe sessions.
- Online repair discussions.
- Tool sharing.
- Education and advocacy about repairing, for example pop-up workshops on the use and repair of sewing machines.

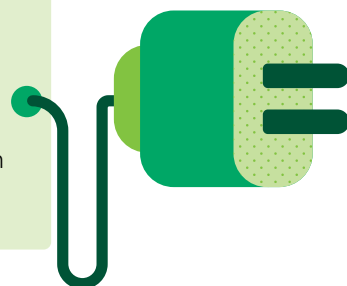
Some repair cafes are also working collectively to support changes to Fair Trading legislation across the various states through the www.australianrepairnetwork.org

Understand your capacity

To help understand your capacity, factor in the equipment and facilities you can access, and your location. Think about what sort of event works best for your organisation's capacity and the community's need.

Whether you're considering pop-up or regular activities, our CE insiders recommend taking into account:

- The availability of repairers. Without them you can't start anything else!
- Finding a space that is usable, secure and accessible.
- The cost of the venue. It is better to find one that is free and that has space to run repair stations and store tools.
- The preferences of your local demographics.
- The demand for specific types of repair.
- Your regulatory obligations such as tag and testing, and Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) requirements.



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, such as volunteer induction and repairer registration. You may find insurance cover directly or through your Neighbourhood House partner.

Inform yourself about the required safety standards when repairing items like toys and electronics. The legal consequences of a failed repair could be highly expensive, which is why most repair hubs/cafes have insurance to cover their work. You may or may not be insured to fix small electrical goods, or you may only be able to fix electricals if someone has been trained to test and tag the repaired appliance for electrical safety. So before you set up your space, determine if you will have the equipment and people to do this.

Often visitors agree to accept the risk by signing a document called a disclaimer, so it's worth taking legal advice about this when you're setting up your program.

Understand your agreements

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

While some repair hubs/cafes are a programs within a Neighbourhood House, others are run by a separate community group that has an MOU with the Neighbourhood House. The MOU sets out, among other things, when and where the events will occur, what equipment can be used, and how to brand promotional material and communications.

To ensure compliance, make sure repair hub/cafe staff and their coordinators are aware of any arrangements relating to their facilities, tools and equipment.

Design activities to change behaviours

Repair hubs/cafes encourage behaviour change around waste, so it helps to think about how all aspects of your activities contribute to this goal.

To encourage waste behaviour change you could consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Teaching people to repair and maintain the life of their items. For example, the repairer can talk the visitor through what they're doing. The repairer can even get the visitor to do parts of the repair while they supervise and advise.

Encouraging visitors to dispose of items that can't be repaired appropriately. You could have a poster of where they can locally dispose of the item. This information will need to be regularly updated.

Changing purchasing behaviour to buy second-hand – not new and/or cheap.

Using education resources to promote the above, e.g. workshops and posters.



Use your events to further educate people on the circular economy. Simply encouraging conversation is valuable. Use case studies to demonstrate and explain what a circular economy looks like as part of day-to-day business. This storytelling can help to build a customer base and develop new partnerships.

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 your program

Run an efficient program

You will probably rely on volunteers to help run your events, so use their time well.

Here are some ways CE insiders recommend you manage repair events:

Tick those that apply to your program

Consider the user experience of your volunteers, repairers and customers. To keep things clear and manage expectations, help all of these stakeholders understand what you can and can't repair.

Find ways to keep your repairers engaged and feeling valued so that you have the right workforce and a happy team to achieve your goals.

Text your repairers one week out from the event to confirm who is available.

Use a concierge at the registration table who welcomes customers, assesses the goods as they arrive, and floats around the repair hub/cafe to help customers where needed.

Provide collateral activities to keep the guests occupied and engaged with the process. Offer tea and coffee. Set up activities for children, such as painting, colouring and sorting.

Set up a booking and weighing system.

Run a record-keeping system to track repairs and collect data to demonstrate the value of your repair activity. Some repair hubs/cafes use the attendance sheet to record the weight of objects saved from landfill.



Promote your program and engage the community

Consider an online booking system

Most repair hubs/cafes have a permanent, or regular, day and venue, which helps to build customer awareness. Some repair hubs/cafes use online bookings (for example, through Humanitix or Eventbrite), which they use to advertise the event 2 to 3 in advance, as well as welcoming walk ins. What you choose to do will depend on your resources.

The advantage of a booking system is that people can see which repairers will be there and your repairers know what sort of items to expect. Another advantage is that you will know where people are travelling from. You can also use a booking system to build an email database to promote your events, and a post-event survey to gather valuable feedback.

Promotion

Consider the most appropriate advertising platforms for your programs and whether or not you plan to target certain groups – different demographics use different media types. Repair hubs/cafes have used Facebook to connect with community groups and buy-nothing groups. Repair hubs/cafes have also set up pop-up events, attended community fairs, and worked with sustainability groups to promote their services.

Understanding your local community

If you understand the demographic profile of your local community, you can improve information about events and repairing so that it's accessible to groups like migrants and refugees.

Set your team up for success

Have clear position descriptions for your volunteers that outline their roles, responsibilities and required skills.

Make sure your people have the appropriate training processes, manuals and resources.

Think about your insurance requirements, and what questions you may need to ask your repairers before they start work on items. Consider your volunteers' needs and what guidance they may require to run the event.

Circular collaboration

Repair hubs/cafes are more effective when they work together. Consider other repair hub/cafe initiatives around you as a supportive and informative network that can help you achieve your shared circular goals. Find your network through fixable.co.

CE insiders say it's a good idea to think about how you might be able to collaborate with other repair groups, for example:

- helping each other with consistent messaging
- sharing knowledge of repair event opportunities
- sharing repairers, knowledge of repair places, parts and sales
- providing local support to broader education campaigns.

Your program will also be much stronger, and achieve better results, if you identify opportunities for partnership with other organisations, such as local government, state government, bicycle recyclers, and neighbourhood houses.



Phase 3: evaluation and improvements

Use your learnings to make improvements

Every time you run a session, think about how you might improve. This might mean sharing knowledge gained on the day with your team, or debriefing later with other repair hubs/cafes. It could even mean developing case studies for best practice.

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

Understand your finance and business obligations

You need 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.

While few repair hubs/cafes charge fees, to encourage attendance at events and to avoid being in direct competition with repair businesses, there are other ways of encouraging financial viability.

Ideas to encourage financial viability:

Tick those that apply to your program

Encourage donations from the public/visitors. For example, provide the option for cash donations/bank transfer/card payment at events. Make T-shirts for your staff to wear with a QR code on it that leads visitors to the donation page of your website.

Provide membership that include perks, such as early booking notifications.

Seek out business donations and sponsorship. For example, ask your local hardware chain to donate materials/equipment.

Sell small upcycled/repaired items at events.

Apply for local council grants and other local organisation grants, for example from Lions Clubs.

Run courses where participants pay fees to cover costs.

Keep an eye out for funding opportunities from philanthropic organisations and different levels of government.

Train your volunteers and staff to apply successfully for grants.



Demonstrate your value

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

Useful resources

- [Fixible.co](https://fixible.co)
- Register with the international repair cafe movement: repaircafe.org/en
- Contribute to international repair data through – RepairMonitor – dashboard.repairmonitor.org/?language=en
- Why we really need to be able to fix our stuff | Enlighten (griffith.edu.au)
- iFixit and Repair Cafe Join Forces | iFixit News – ifixit.com/News/66508/ifixit-and-repair-cafe-join-forces
- Australian Repair Network – griffith.edu.au/law-futures-centre/our-research/australian-repair-network
- Repair Cafe Australia – facebook.com/RepairCafeAustralia/
- Repair Groups Australia – facebook.com/groups/repairandshareaustralia/about

Sunshine Repair Cafe



Sunshine Repair Cafe is a volunteer-led repair cafe in Brimbank that teaches the local community to repair, re-use, and re-purpose. Repair coordinator Mark Mink says, “A repair cafe should encourage good consumer behaviour and help to build habits where people store items that might need repair. We want to encourage a ‘learning to fix’ approach, where people come into our repair shop and fix their own items using borrowed tools.”

Read more www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/news/news-articles/fix-dont-toss-repair-cafes-teach-community-to-repair-re-use-refurbish