



Insider tips on
*running a textile
waste 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 textile waste 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
- Hard waste recovery
- Special waste streams

Textile waste

Clothes and textiles are an everyday part of everyone's life. And textile waste has become one of the largest contributors to Australia's waste problem. Textile waste repair, recycling and re-use initiatives help to keep textiles and fashion in the system for longer.

If you are considering starting your own community textile waste initiative, the CE insiders we spoke to for this guide suggest considering all of the following steps on your path to success.

Key learnings from our insiders are highlighted in **bold** – they are some of the trickier aspects of running a textile waste recovery initiative that are worth deeper consideration because they may present more challenges and opportunities along the way.

Phase 1: scope and plan

Establish baseline community need and capability

Learn about your employees, volunteers, the people making or processing textiles, and waste collection partners in your target area. Research their knowledge of and buy-in to circular economy ideals, and their attitudes and behaviours regarding buying and repairing textiles.

Our CE insiders suggest that you will be in a better position to run a suitable program that matches skills with resources if you understand the other organisations in this field and how you will differentiate yourself, or offer complementary services.

Understand where your materials are coming from, and how to get them to you. And evaluate your workers' abilities to make repairs and alterations, or to create new goods and garments.

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.

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

Tick those that apply to your program

Collect and deliver end-of-line textiles, which may include running and maintaining vehicles or running a pool of volunteer drivers.

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

Assess and sell donated end-of-line clothing.

Up-cycle products. Run workshops or a factory line production to turn recycled material into new products. For example, workshops to turn clothes rejected for resale into other items like handbags and toys.

Inventory and store material and clothes.

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

Organise pick and pack relief packages.

Run pop-up clothing exchanges or donation events.

Open a store to sell used items.



Set your boundaries

To help you refine the scope of your program, the CE insiders recommend you consider what you have the capacity to run, and whether that matches need. Also consider the equipment and facilities you have access to, as well as your location.

Think about what sort of arrangement works best for you.

Whether you run pop-up workshops or decide to run a permanent factory or warehouse, the CE insiders recommend you take into account:

- Your space – it needs to be fit for purpose, secure and accessible to workers.
- The preferences of your local demographics.
- Having a visible and accessible shopfront, if sales are part of your plan.
- What specific types of clothes and accessories your customers need.
- The availability of employees, volunteers, warehouse staff and sewists.



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 textile waste recovery is generally to encourage behaviour change in relation to waste, so it helps to think about how all aspects of your public interactions contribute to this goal.

You could consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Teaching people to safely store then donate unwanted clothes.

Educating the community about responsible donating to reduce illegal dumping and the associated waste costs that will impact your program's viability.

Working with retailers and manufacturers to adopt more sustainable processes to prevent end-of-line issues.

Working with retailers and manufacturers to encourage them to donate end-of-line issue items rather than dumping them in landfill.

Encouraging appropriate disposal of clothing that your program can't repair or accept.

Changing purchasing behaviour to 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 usefulness and effectiveness in impacting behaviour change, suggest the CE insiders. This will also help you demonstrate your value to key stakeholders, including funders.

Phase 2: implement your program

Run an efficient program

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

You might consider:

Tick those that apply to your program

Creating a system to assess donated garments as they arrive, and to help you manage 'lumpy' or inconsistent supply. This is a key learning from the CE insiders we spoke to, and an important challenge for all textile waste initiatives because it impacts your workforce, your storage capacity and your income.

Using a stock and inventory system to keep track of garments made or donated so you can demonstrate your activity's value. This is also a key learning from our CE insiders.

Developing a design team and workplace management system for repairs and creating new garments.

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

Developing a sound business and marketing plan, and a budget.



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 using second-hand fashion and textiles 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

Textile waste programs are more effective when they work together, report our CE insiders. Consider other textile waste initiatives as a supportive and informative network that can help you achieve your shared circular goals.

Think about how you might collaborate with each other, for example:

- Help each other with consistent messaging.
- Share knowledge of public event opportunities.
- Share sewists and knowledge of machinery repair places, parts, and sales.
- Provide local support to broader education campaigns.

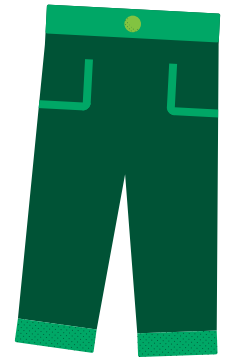
Your program will be much stronger and more likely to achieve results if you can identify opportunities for partnership with existing organisations, such as local government, state government, textile retailers and manufacturers, op shops, and neighbourhood houses.

Phase 3: evaluation and improvements

Use your learnings to make improvements

Program managers do well when they think about how they can 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 to record or document the solution so that it can be repeated or applied elsewhere. Set up an easy-to-use document management system so everyone can access information quickly. There are freedocument 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 textile waste programs, so think about ways you can encourage this, for example:

Tick those that apply to your program

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

Encouraging awareness of funding opportunities from philanthropic organisations and different levels of government.

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

Fostering skills in your volunteers and staff to produce successful applications.

Setting up ways to encourage donations.

Putting a price on waste from donors, especially 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, say the CE insiders. This measuring and storytelling activity 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](#).

