

March 2024

# Circular economy statement

We acknowledge the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of our local area.





Free sewing classes help our residents repair their clothes.  
Photo: Cassandra Hannagan/City of Sydney

# What is the circular economy?

The circular economy is a different way to look at the things we buy, use and dispose of. It is an opportunity to rethink buying or building something new in the first place.

Our current economic system is a linear system where we take resources, make products and throw them away.

When we recycle, we give products a second life. But in a fully circular economy, services are carefully designed for sharing and products are designed for reusing, repairing and refurbishing many times before they need to be recycled.

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## Why we should transition to a circular economy

If we continue with our current system of 'take, make, use, dispose', it will result in permanent loss of our earth's limited resources and continue to negatively impact our natural ecosystems and social wellbeing.

Transitioning to a circular economy isn't just about helping the environment – it's also a great opportunity to boost our local economy and strengthen community connections.

### (1) Saving money and resources with circular practices

When businesses and organisations go circular, they find smart ways to save money and cut costs.

This can be by cutting down on waste, using recycled or repurposed materials, sharing products and equipment or making products that last longer and are easier to fix.

### (2) Creating jobs and new markets

Going circular isn't just about saving – it's also about making money. With some support, businesses can team up to buy and sell things at scale. This collaboration helps them create

new markets and job opportunities. As they grow, they create new local industries, increase demand for skilled workers and boost our local economy.

In fact, experts say the circular economy could be worth a staggering \$23 billion in Australia.

### (3) Strengthening our economy's resilience

Beyond the money-saving and money-making, going circular also makes our local economy more resilient.

Circular businesses rely less on international suppliers for their input materials and resources. That means they're less vulnerable to shocks like pandemics or global trade issues and can reinforce social inclusion.

Embracing a circular economy isn't just a win for the environment – it's a win for our local economy too. While it helps businesses save money and creates jobs, it also makes our communities more resilient in challenging times.

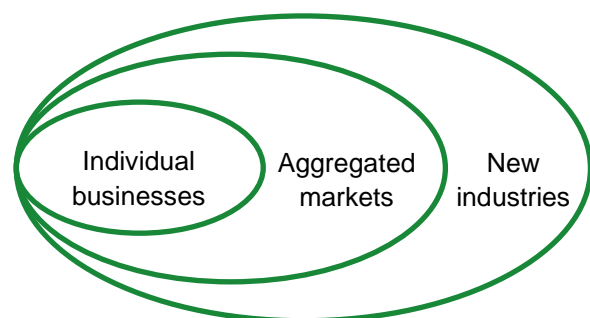


Figure: Scalability of circular economy initiatives.

### (4) Boosting community connections

Many circular initiatives happen at a local level and bring together communities to reduce waste and preserve resources. This can encourage collaboration and reinforce a changing system at a local level.



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## Driving cultural change

While the circular economy has a strong focus on materials, market systems and legislation, essentially it requires a change in people's attitudes and behaviours.

For the circular economy to succeed, we must ask ourselves if we need to consume new products in the first place.

In many cases there will be opportunities to reuse, repair or borrow existing products. Or there will be other ways to achieve the same outcome without using new resources.

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## Circular economy principles

### (1) Design out waste and pollution

If we need to make something new, rather than designing something that can only be used once then discarded, we should make items that can be used or shared many times.



Choosing reusable takeaway options helps reduce waste.  
Photo: Cassandra Hannagan/City of Sydney

Our libraries are a great example of the original sharing economy. The modern sharing economy is gaining momentum too, with a shift towards service products over owned items. This includes streaming TV rather than buying DVDs, or car sharing, with the City of Sydney supporting more than 800 on-street, car share parking spaces.

When designing out waste and pollution, the built environment must be considered too. Construction and demolition waste is the single largest waste stream in our local area.

The best way to avoid waste and pollution is to design places using low carbon materials that have a longer life and can be easily adapted for future needs to avoid demolition.

### (2) Keep materials at their highest value

We should keep products and materials in use for as long as possible by reusing products repeatedly, and by repairing and refurbishing them when they break or deteriorate.



Providing spaces to repair and refurbish is crucial to making the most of the resources we have.

Photo: Cassandra Hannagan/City of Sydney

By repairing or refurbishing we retain a product's worth. Immediately dismantling it for recycling or disposal significantly reduces its value or creates a cost to dispose.

### (3) Regenerate nature

Regeneration is the act of replicating and increasing natural systems rather than depleting them. It can apply to many industries including farming and food production.

Using organic composts is one way to regenerate soil as part of a sustainable food system, and localising food systems and increasing urban agriculture can reduce food miles and waste.

Using products and materials for longer also means less need for raw materials.



Composting is a great way to promote soil regeneration.

Photo: Cassandra Hannagan/City of Sydney

# Circularity at the City of Sydney

## Our future role in the circular economy

The regular functions of local government can have several connections with a circular economy model. The City of Sydney's community strategic plan supports the development of a circular economy across our organisation and local area.

While we don't make or extract raw materials, we have some responsibility for how places and buildings are designed in our area.

And while we don't produce items, we do buy and use them. We are responsible for collecting waste and recycling from our residents, our own buildings and our public spaces.

We also contract with industry to process, recycle and dispose of waste we collect.

It is important to note there is no one blueprint for transitioning to a circular economy. It will require shared responsibility from all levels of government, industry and our communities.

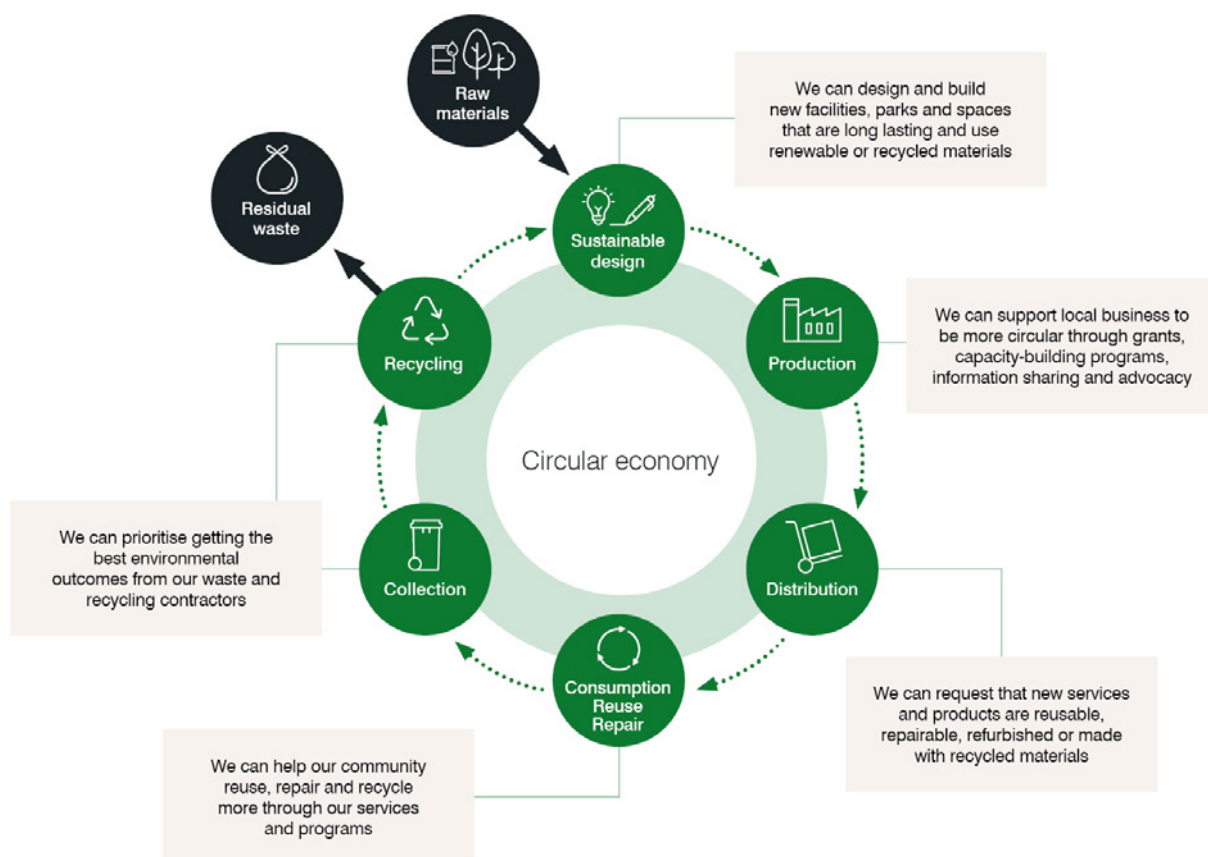


Figure: Illustration of the circular economy, adapted from the European Commission, and how the City of Sydney can aspire to participate.

## Our circular journey so far

We have many examples of supporting circular economy achievements at the City of Sydney.

In our own operations, we have started to change the conversation with service providers, create efficiencies with materials and minimise waste by:

- incorporating recycled content in our major road, cycleway and footpath projects
- requiring circular design considerations in our new major depot redevelopment
- reusing furniture and office equipment in our buildings when they are renovated
- replacing single-use cups and plates with reusable items at our events
- composting food waste from our offices and large community centres and using it in our parks as fertiliser
- extending the life of Christmas decorations by donating them to other councils or organisations.

### Paving the Way

The City of Sydney supports the Paving the Way program, which uses crushed glass over raw sand to build roads and footpaths.



Recycled materials are used as standard for most of our traffic engineering projects. Photo: Sydney Civil

This reduces the transport of glass interstate and provides a long-term market for what was considered a waste product.

We are now trialling other materials like crumb rubber from old tyres to see if it improves the performance of our roads.

### Clothes swaps

We host regular clothes swap events for our residents, to help fight textile waste and give good-quality clothing a second life.



City of Sydney clothes swap event.  
Photo: Adam Hollingworth/City of Sydney

In our local area we support circularity through our business support programs, community workshops, library services and grants. Actions include:

- providing education and sharing information about circularity
- hosting community clothes swaps and sewing and repair workshops
- providing an accommodation grant for a furniture repair workshop in Redfern
- leading the conversation around sustainable office furniture and fit outs with our Better Buildings Partnership program
- extending traditional library borrowing to include toys, puzzles, instruments and makerspace kits
- advocating for state and federal government policy changes that will support the transition to a more circular system
- providing more than \$400,000 in grants for resource recovery and circular economy related projects and services since 2018.

Our community grants program has also allowed us to support not-for-profits and businesses in our area to expand the local circular economy. We have highlighted the following 4 grant recipients.



### ReLove

The City of Sydney is supporting ReLove to provide good-quality rescued furniture and household items at no cost, direct to families in crisis.

Furniture is rescued from suppliers with surplus stock, corporate companies and community donations.

On average, ReLove supports 15 families each week.



ReLove furniture warehouse in Botany.  
Photo: Abril Felman/City of Sydney

### ReCo

ReCo developed a plastic-free refill delivery service for laundry and dishwasher powders.

The City of Sydney awarded ReCo an innovation grant to create a scalable refill delivery system, boosting this local small business.



Delivery of products in reusable containers.  
Photo: Jason de Plater/ReCo

### Revolve ReCYCLING

Revolve ReCYCLING was awarded a City of Sydney grant to pilot bike collection and redeployment in our local area.

Revolve rescues bikes from landfill, then repairs and resells them at affordable prices. Bikes for kids are rescued, repaired and donated to those who need them.



Bike maintenance and repair in Alexandria.  
Photo: Revolve ReCYCLING

### Dempstah

Dempstah, a Sydney-based design practice exploring textile waste recycling and reuse, received an innovation and ideas grant from the City of Sydney.

The grant funded a trial to create recycled textile yarn from clothing donated to the Salvation Army that was not suitable for resale and would be sent to landfill. The yarn, created from more than 50% recycled content, can be used to create new textiles.

Dempstah was awarded a national prize to help further scale its business.



Recycling old clothing into yarn to make new clothing. Photo: Dempstah

## The challenges of transitioning to a circular economy

The transition to a circular economy will require action from government, industry and our communities. The first step is recognising the challenges to becoming more circular:

- Destined for disposal – the way we currently design and make things is centred around their ability to be recycled, or more often discarded, at end of life, not reused or repaired.
- Cheaper to buy new – our current economic system does not support industries that repair, refurbish and recycle products and materials.
- Access to information – product manufacturers are concerned with losing competitive advantage and as a result are less likely to share information.
- Need for convenience – the need for convenient and low-cost products, and our desire for new products, is not always compatible with sustainable buying choices.
- Regulatory and policy barriers – many of our current federal and state policies do little to support or promote circular systems.

## How we can be more circular in the future

Our community strategic plan sets out our long-term vision, targets, outcomes and measures for where we see the City of Sydney in 2050.

As part of that vision, we would like to see a circular economy approach embedded in products, services and systems with resources retained for as long as possible and disposal minimised.

To achieve this, we will advocate for policy changes and economic incentives at state and federal levels that support the transition to a circular economy.

In our own operations and in our local area we will continue to create opportunities for increased circularity through our:

- design and planning for buildings and spaces
- specifications for materials
- procurement of products and services
- grant programs
- business support programs
- sustainability programs
- resource recovery programs.

We are updating our strategies for managing waste, resources and economic development in our area. These strategies will respond to the actions and advocacy needs in our plan, Sustainable Sydney 2030–2050 Continuing the Vision.

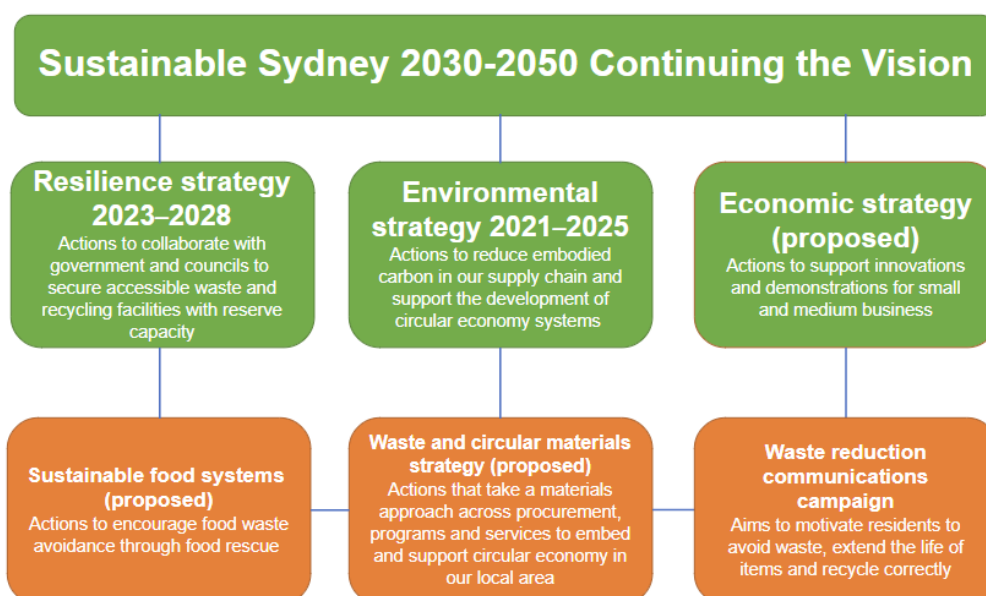


Figure: Circular economy as part of the City of Sydney's strategic plans and actions.



In the future, as our understanding and our role in the circular economy becomes clearer, we anticipate our actions and activities will become more deliberate, scalable and systematic.

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## What is the role of others?

Both federal and state governments support transitioning to a circular economy.

Federal and state environment ministers have agreed to work with industry to design out waste and pollution, keep materials in use and foster markets to achieve a circular economy by 2030.

The policies and tools to achieve these outcomes are the national waste policy and the recently established Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group.

At a state level, the NSW Government published its circular economy policy statement, Too Good to Waste, in 2019.

The main document for achieving the policy goals is the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041. This strategy is supported by the NSW Plastics Action Plan and the EPA Waste Delivery Plan.

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## References

[Australian Government Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group](#)

[Department of Environment and Energy 2018 National Waste Policy](#)

[Australian Government 2019, 2022 National Waste Policy Action Plan](#)

[NSW Government 2019 Circular Economy Policy Statement: Too Good to Waste](#)

[NSW Government Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041](#)

**RECYCLE  
HERE!**



Image: Uniform recycling trial, Alexandra Canal Depot.  
Photo: Cassandra Hannagan/City of Sydney