



Community Reuse Programs: Small-Scale Strategies



Why Reuse?

Reuse fulfills the “triple bottom line” approach: people, planet, and profit

- Has a greater beneficial impact than just recycling
- Keeps usable items in productive use and prevents them from being wasted prematurely
- Provides affordable access to goods
- Generates job training opportunity and pathways out of poverty
- Promotes social connection and sense of community by bringing people together
- Helps to conserve natural resources and lower greenhouse gas emissions

It's a win-win-win for everyone involved!



Steps for Starting a Reuse Program

Step 1. Conduct a community waste audit

This helps identify what materials are commonly thrown out that could potentially be reused. It can also help identify potential community partners.

Step 2. Find partners & funding

Reach out to local organizations, community leaders, and businesses to identify those who may be willing to donate or lend reusable items (e.g., books, toys, kitchenware, clothing).

For funding, there are a number of ways to obtain the funds to start a small-scale reuse program, including: fundrais- ing events, grants, municipal funds, private-public partnerships, corporate sponsorships, and community donations.

Step 3. Identify a space

Find a space where reusable items can be collected, sorted, and distributed. This can be anything from a temporary, public “pop-up” space (e.g., park, college campus) or a dedicated physical space (e.g., reclaimed building, unused storefronts, sheds).

Step 4. Set guidelines

Establish guidelines for what types of items can be accepted, how they should be sorted/displayed, and best prac- tices for the program. This helps the program to run smoothly and ensure items are in usable condition.

Step 5. Train volunteers

Recruit volunteers to help with sorting and distributing items. Train them on guidelines and procedures for your reuse program.

Step 6. Promote your program

Spread the word through flyers, social media, community events, local news, etc. Encourage people to donate items they no longer need and to participate in the reuse program.

Step 7. Evaluate & adjust

Regularly evaluate the program and make adjustments as needed. Remember: it's all a learning process!



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Types of Small-Scale Strategies

Reuse Programs

These often require a brick-and-mortar, dedicated physical space with municipal support. The physical space can be a trailer, empty lot, unused storefront, shed, community center, public library, etc. These programs can be open seasonally or year-round. Many of these programs can occur together and complement one another.

Library of Things

Community libraries are not just for books and media! For example, a tool library is a space where residents can borrow tools that they may only need for a short period of time. Other libraries can include: toys, machinery (e.g., lawn mowers, log splitters, wood chippers, pressure washers, etc), special occasion clothing (e.g., tuxedos), camping/outdoor gear, party supplies, sporting equipment, lawn games, projectors, etc.

Take It Or Leave It (TIOLI) Sheds

Also referred to as “swap sheds” and “give-and-take sheds”, TIOLI sheds are typically small outdoor structures where people can leave unwanted items that are still in usable condition, and/or take items that they need for free. They can be located in parks, community centers, transfer stations, and other public spaces.

Repair Cafes

These are free meeting places where people repair things together. Repair cafes contain all the tools and materials to help residents make repairs they need to clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, ceramics, toys, etc. They are staffed by volunteers with repair skills in many fields who are available to assist and educate residents. Residents are also encouraged to help one another with repairs. Repair Cafes can offer tea, coffee, and reading materials (such as books on repair and DIY).

Reuse Centers

Similar to a thrift or consignment store where household goods, textiles, appliances, toys, media, etc. are donated and sold at an affordable price. However, reuse centers differ in that they often also offer architectural and building salvage. Many reuse centers also host repair cafes, libraries of things, and can have “free” sections like a TIOLI shed.

Simple “pop-up” Reuse Events

These are events that can be hosted anywhere, especially in public spaces, and don't necessarily require municipal support. Often these programs are hosted regularly, but they can also happen seasonally or once, depending on community need and participation.

Community Garage/Yard Sales

These can be as simple as a coordination of neighbors hosting personal garage sales at the same time. Another strategy is hosting a community garage sale in a well-known, highly-frequented public space such as a farmers' market, flea market, etc. Communities can also advertise their garage sale through Facebook, Craigslist, YardSaleSearch.com, GSalr.com, community boards, etc.

Book Exchanges

These are different from public libraries in the way that they can be done anywhere. Residents bring already read or unused books and media to swap and share.

Community Clothing Swaps

Similar to book exchanges, residents bring gently used clothing items to a designated location where they can be swapped with others.

K-12 School Hand-Me-Down Events

As children inevitably grow out of their clothing and shoes, families can come together to donate clothing that children have outgrown to their younger peers.

College Campus Move-Out Events

At the end of each semester, volunteers collect and sort usable materials from campus dorm rooms and college housing. These items can be stored over the summer and then redistributed during Fall move-in.

Local Auctions

These involve the sale of pre-owned items to interested buyers within the community. Local auctions offer a wider variety of items for sale (e.g., furniture, textiles, household goods, collectibles, antiques, etc) and allow individuals to find unique, rare items. Local auctions sometimes benefit and support local charitable causes.

Deconstruction (“Green Demolition”)

Often thought of as building in reverse, this is the process of taking a building apart piece by piece and salvaging materials instead of demolishing them. When deconstructed this way, most building materials can be recycled and reused. These events can be powered by volunteers to get started.

