

A person in a kayak is in the foreground, with their paddle visible. In the background, another person is kayaking on a calm lake. The scene is overlaid with a dark blue filter.

GOING CIRCULAR: A GUIDE FOR VICTORIA'S VISITOR ECONOMY

DESTINATION GREATER
VICTORIA

PREPARED BY:
SYNERGY
FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

Greater Victoria's visitor economy is a forward-thinking, stewardship-minded destination, earning the ranking of #1 Sustainable Destination in North America by the [Global Destination Sustainability Index](#) in 2024. In 2024-25, DGV partnered with Project Zero's [Circular Economy Accelerator](#) to help member businesses identify practical ways to increase operational efficiency while incorporating circular economy business practices into their operations.

Six Destination Greater Victoria (DGV) members participated in the program, receiving tailored sustainability assessments across different areas of circularity:

- Eliminate & reduce
- Reuse (internal & external)
- Procurement
- Diversion
- Leadership & training
- Redesign & innovation
- Water & energy

This report summarizes key opportunities identified through those assessments to offer actionable steps that DGV members can take to increase circularity in their own operations.



DGV member program participants:

- Eagle Wing Whale & Wildlife Watching Tours
- Inn at Laurel Point
- Oswego Hotel
- Prince of Whales Whale & Wildlife Watching Tours
- Spinnakers Brewpub
- Victoria Women In Need Community Cooperative

WHAT IS THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

Our current linear “take-make-waste” economy underutilizes natural resources, with only 6.9% of materials worldwide circulated back into the economy at end-of-life and the rest ending up in landfill or as pollution.

The circular economy presents an alternative economic model that separates economic activity from resource extraction. Instead of ending up in landfill, resources are recirculated through the economy, thereby retaining their value within the system.

A circular economy helps to:



Eliminate waste



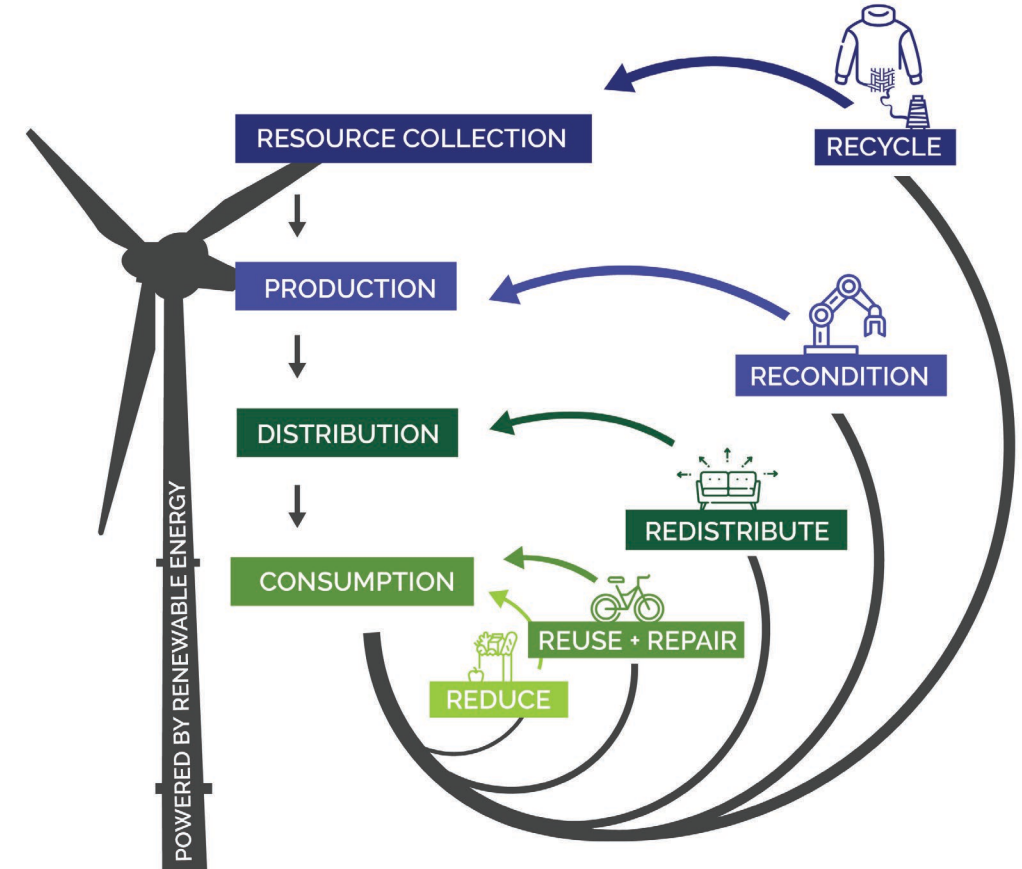
Reduce emissions



Cut virgin resource consumption



LINEAR ECONOMY



CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Credit: [Project Zero](#)

WHY ADOPT CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES?

The circular economy is often recognized for its environmental benefits, but also presents significant economic advantages, representing a [\\$4.5 trillion dollar opportunity](#) for global economic growth by 2030. For businesses in the tourism sector, circular economy principles offer opportunities to strengthen brand reputation, increase resilience, remain competitive, and support regenerative tourism, which seeks to positively impact local communities and ecosystems.



Cut operational costs

Reduce utility use and waste disposal expenses



Attract investment

Appeal to funders seeking long-term, sustainable, and innovative projects



Create new revenue streams

Transform waste into a resource and expand your offerings



Retain & attract top talent

Appeal to quality, values-aligned employees



Build brand awareness & sustainable reputation

Align your brand with guest values and differentiate yourself from competitors



Improve supply chain resilience

Foster a closed-loop system to insulate from supply chain disruptions

CIRCULARITY IN THE GREATER VICTORIA VISITOR ECONOMY

During the Accelerator program, each business participant worked with a circular advisor, who gathered baseline data and conducted an in-depth site visit using a custom tool with over 70 circular indicators. Businesses received custom sustainability action plans featuring recommendations to adopt circular principles, insights into green and innovative practices to boost efficiency and revenue, and a clear roadmap with estimated costs, timelines, and recommendations for funding opportunities.

The following metrics were calculated from the six participating DGV member businesses:

Total Circular Opportunities Identified



260

Current Average % Circularity



62%

Potential Annual Expense Savings



\$16,350

The following savings could be realized if businesses were to implement each action from their sustainability plan:

Potential Annual Water Savings



87 m³

Potential Annual Emissions Reduced



71 tCO₂e

Potential Annual Waste Diverted



5,630 kg

Potential Annual Energy Saved



123,146 kWh

This impact captures potential reductions from measurable actions only. Additional savings may be realized through implementation of further actions.

INCORPORATING CIRCULARITY INTO YOUR OPERATIONS

Circular economy principles can be incorporated into different areas of your business operations. The following section will outline circular actions to implement under the areas specified below:



Eliminating &
Reducing
Waste



Rethinking
Procurement



Maximizing
Diversion



Strengthening
Leadership
& Training



Optimizing
Operational
Efficiency

ELIMINATING AND REDUCING WASTE X

The most resource-efficient way to contribute to a circular economy is to eliminate and reduce waste before it is generated.



Replace single-use items like packaging, hygiene dispensers, or coffee pods with reusable or bulk alternatives.



Install energy-efficient hand dryers in bathrooms; energy-efficient hand dryers average 95% cost savings compared to paper towels and reduce waste significantly.

Use [this calculator](#) to see how much you can save.



Use tap water for drinking and consider installing a filtration system to encourage use. Place water refill stations in high-traffic areas and add water conservation signage to improve uptake.



Check out the City of Victoria's Sustainable Takeout Guide to find the best alternatives to single-use plastics!

[Find the guide here](#)



RETHINKING PROCUREMENT

Circular procurement practices can reduce waste and emissions, build resilience, and inspire a ripple effect down the supply chain.



Adopt a Circular Procurement approach using the following considerations:

- **Pre-Purchase** - Assess if the purchase is necessary, identify circular business models, and engage with suppliers early to align on circular goals.
- **Purchase** - Apply circular criteria in product specs, prioritize low-impact, long-lasting, and recyclable products, and consider full life cycle: sourcing, use, and end-of-life.
- **Post-Purchase** - Extend product life through maintenance and refurbishment, enable reuse within or across organizations, and ensure responsible recovery and recycling



Choose environmentally friendly cleaning products. Look for bio-based, biodegradable, pH-balanced, 100% natural, EcoLogo or Green Seal certified products.

[The Soap Exchange](#) is a local Victoria business specializing in sustainable cleaning products, offering bulk purchasing options and a convenient refill program.



Support local! Purchasing from local suppliers not only supports the local economy and builds resilience but also reduces emissions associated with transportation.

Check out [Unwrapit](#) for your next corporate gifting campaign!

This Canadian gifting platform partners with ethical vendors to offer low-waste, sustainable gift options for clients, employees, event attendees, and more.

Find more local sustainable businesses with the BC Green Business member directory!

[Local Green Businesses on Vancouver Island!](#) 

MAXIMIZING DIVERSION

Reducing and diverting waste retains the value of resources within the economy while reducing disposal costs.



Set up clearly defined waste diversion stations. Small, simple adjustments can help guests and team members quickly differentiate between bins and increase sorting:

- **Signage** – Use large capitalized text and images to help sorting.
- **Colour** – Differentiate each bin by colour.
- **Graphics** – Add clear graphics to minimize contamination.
- **Location** – Ensure bins are placed in high-traffic traffic accessible areas.



Conduct a waste audit to understand your waste volumes and types. Set waste reduction and diversion targets based on your results and train your team, including janitorial staff, to help achieve your goals.

Check out these user-friendly [waste audit tools](#)



Recycle linens, hygiene products, and lost and found items through [Soap for Hope Canada](#), which will be upcycled and given to those in need.



Did you know that placing bins 1.5m from a door [boosts recycling and composting rates by 141%](#)?

You can download **free waste diversion signs** [here!](#) 







Visit the [Recyclepedia](#) to find recycling options by material

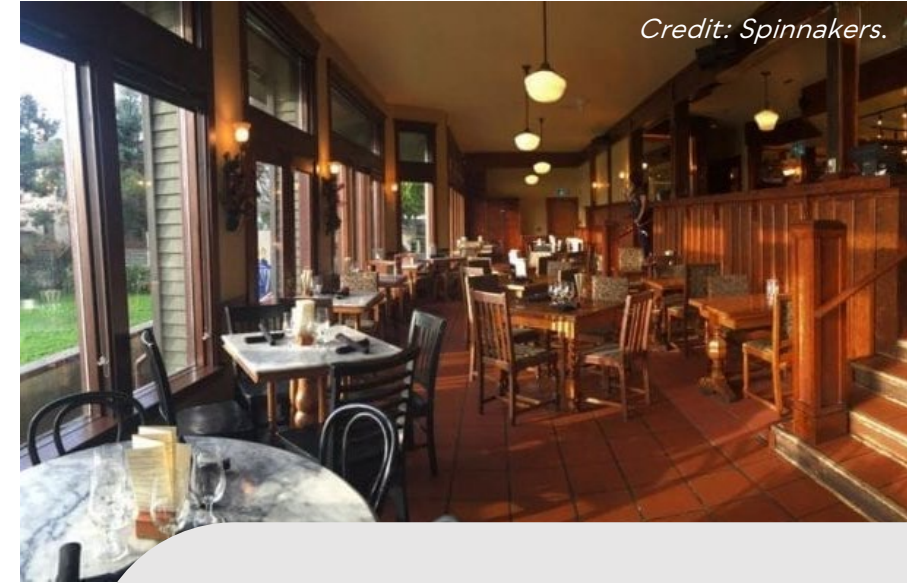
SUCCESS STORY: SPINNAKERS BREWPUB

Spinnakers Brewpub has been serving beer, spirits, and food since 1984. Their main location in Vic West hosts brewing and distilling operations as well as a pub and guest houses.

Through comprehensive waste sorting practices and relationships with community partners, Spinnakers has achieved an impressive **waste diversion rate of 96%**!

How they do it:

-  Track **food waste** using Optimum Control software to find reduction opportunities
-  Backhaul **spent grains** to malt supplier [Five Field Farm](#)
-  Extend life of **cooking oil** with [Frylow](#) then upcycle used oil with [Ergo Eco Solutions](#)
-  Recycle **hard-to-recycle items** like lightbulbs and small appliances
-  Transform **waste beer** into vinegar
-  Use a clearly organized **waste sorting station** to help team members sort refundables and optimize bin size to reduce number of pick-ups



Credit: Spinnakers.

Much of Spinnakers' waste, including spent grains, food waste, and cooking oil are recirculated to local partners, who will upcycle the waste into new products. This creates **economic opportunity and resilience** within southern Vancouver Island.

STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING



Companies that step outside the “business as usual” model can attract and retain staff and guests that care about their environmental impact. According to Expedia, [2/3 of travelers](#) want to see more sustainable information from lodging providers!



Empower your team to discuss sustainability initiatives, including the use of local products and initiatives led by your organization.

The [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) offers a range of circular economy courses. Encourage your team to explore and expand their knowledge!



Publicly share commitment to sustainability, position your business as a sustainability leader, and expand your customer base while raising awareness for environmental initiatives.



Incorporate Circular Economy training into employees’ orientation. Clearly communicate your organization’s sustainability initiatives, values, and goals as part of the onboarding process.

Information to share:

- Your environmental values
- Circular practices (e.g. innovative reuse or waste practices, procurement policies)
- Examples highlighting your local and/or sustainable suppliers

Ways to share:





- Place signage and infographics around your location
- Create a sustainability page on your website
- Post on your social feeds and blog

Check out the Inn at Laurel Point’s [webpage](#) for inspiration! 

SUCCESS STORY: INN AT LAUREL POINT

Inn at Laurel Point is an early adopter of green practices, becoming Canada's first carbon neutral hotel in 2009. They have built a strong brand image around sustainability by sharing their values and practices with guests and staff, helping the hotel to achieve its sustainability goals.

How they do it:

-  Feature **custom graphics** on back-of-house waste diversion stations for easy sorting
-  Host monthly meetings with SustaINN **sustainability team**
-  Include **green goals and values** in employee hiring and orientation
-  Strategize around circular economy assessment with all departments, **increasing collaboration** towards implementing circular actions
-  **Engage team** in Earth Day events including garbage pickup and trivia
-  Display a **sustainability page** on their website
-  Publicly share **green goals** and report annually on their progress



Credit: Inn at Laurel Point.

DID YOU KNOW?

Inn at Laurel Point's overall waste diversion rate rose from 74% to 87% between 2023-24!

OPTIMIZING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Water, fuel, and energy pose significant costs for businesses. Finding efficiencies for equipment, buildings, and processes can uncover significant reductions in environmental impact and associated costs.



Fit all sinks with low-flow aerators (< 6Lpm). This is an inexpensive way to reduce water consumption by up to 38 m³ per faucet.

Get your faucets assessed and equipped with aerators for free through the CRD's [Commercial Aerator Replacement Program](#).



Draft seal windows and doors. This is one of the most affordable ways to reduce heating costs and can save you up to [10% in heating in the winter months](#).



Install motion sensors for lighting in less frequented areas to reduce energy consumption by [about 25% or more per fixture](#). Upgrade your lighting to increase efficiency – estimate your potential savings with [this calculator](#).

Did you know?

BC Hydro and FortisBC offer **free energy consultations** to help identify low- and no-cost conservation measures, potential efficiency upgrades, and available rebates.






[BC Hydro – Free Energy Consultation](#) 

[Fortis BC – Commercial Energy Assessment](#) 

SUCCESS STORY: PRINCE OF WHALES

Prince of Whales offers eco-friendly marine tours from Victoria, Vancouver, and Telegraph Cove. Their tours are designed to inspire and engage guests about the importance of sustainability and marine conservation, featuring [green practices](#) and touchpoints throughout the guest experience that inspire positive behaviour change.

How they do it:

-  Guests are encouraged to bring their own **reusable water bottles** onboard and take low carbon transport to the tour departure point
-  Food and beverages are low-packaging and eco-friendly, with a focus on **local producers** like [Irene's Bakery](#), [Level Ground Coffee](#), and [Spinners](#)
-  At the beginning of tours, **guests are educated** on how to properly sort waste
-  **Landfill bins are excluded from galley areas** on vessels to ensure food waste and containers are composted, recycled, or reused
-  Team members **hand-sort waste** after tours to prevent contamination



DID YOU KNOW?

A [Booking.com survey](#) found that 76% of travellers want to travel more sustainably.



GETTING STARTED

Any business, regardless of sector or size, can benefit from adopting circular economy principles.

Follow these five steps to get started:

- 1 **Assess your starting point** by collecting baseline data on your waste streams, energy and water use, and procurement practices to understand your current operations.
- 2 **Set green goals** that clearly define priority areas and a timeline for improvement.
- 3 **Engage your team** to brainstorm circular actions, innovative technologies, and other opportunities that will help you achieve your goals. Start with a Green Team!
- 4 **Collaborate locally** with other businesses, suppliers, and organizations who can share resources and solutions.
- 5 **Evaluate your impact** by tracking progress against your baseline data to assess and adjust your current strategies.



WHAT'S NEXT?

DGV members who completed the Circular Economy Accelerator Program will continue to receive support from Project Zero as they continue to implement actions from their sustainability assessments.

Additional results and findings from the program will be available in 2026.

RESOURCES

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
FREE ENERGY CONSULTATIONS	
BC Hydro Free Consultation	Free consultations for small- to mid-sized businesses to identify energy-saving opportunities, provide advice about financial incentives you may qualify for, and provide a report of your current technologies and new, energy-efficient replacement options.
Fortis BC Free Consultation	These assessments identify low and no-cost energy conservation measures, potential energy efficiency upgrades, and available rebates from FortisBC.
NETWORK & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	
BC Green Business	BC Green Business members are leaders in sustainable business. They are collectively reducing waste and emissions, conserving energy, water, and forests, and increasing their social impact.
Coast Waste Management Association	The CWMA hosts regular working groups to facilitate information sharing and collaboration in specific industries and locations. These action-oriented groups help participants share expertise, develop solutions, and implement successful strategies to manage waste.
edX: Circular Economy: An Introduction	This explores the Circular Economy: how businesses can create value by reusing and recycling products, how designers can come up with amazingly clever solutions, and how you can contribute to make the Circular Economy happen.
WASTE TOOLS	
Bin signage	Print clear waste diversion signage from Project Zero to make waste diversion faster and easier while reducing contamination.
Waste audit tools	Project Zero's waste audit tools can help you understand your business' waste streams, volumes, and diversion rates as well as associated costs.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
FUNDING PROGRAMS	
BC Employer Training Grant	WorkBC offers training grants that cover 80% of eligible program expenses including tuition and books up to \$10,000 per employee.
BC Hydro Business Energy-Saving Incentives	BC Hydro offers funding for energy-efficient equipment upgrades, covering approximately 25% of the upfront costs for lighting, HVAC, refrigeration, and mechanical technologies. See catalogue of eligible configurations and products here .
BC Hydro rebates for solar panels and battery storage	BC Hydro offers rebates of up to \$25,000 for grid-connected solar panels and up to an additional \$25,000 for battery storage systems.
CleanBC Go Electric	CleanBC offers rebates for vehicle (up to \$8,000) and charging infrastructure (up to \$25,000) purchases to help individuals and businesses transition to electric vehicles. See rebates for businesses and organizations here .
Eco Canada	This program provides employers with wage subsidies and offers training programs to environmental employees and graduates to upgrade their skills.
FortisBC rebates	FortisBC offers a variety of rebates and offers for business customers, from equipment retrofits, facility upgrades, and more.
FUNDING SEARCH TOOLS	
CleanBC Better Buildings Incentive Search Tool	A tool to filter eligible funding opportunities for capital upgrades, including equipment electrification and energy efficiency projects.