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Planning to Unlock the Potential of Circular Cities

Cities are increasingly turning to more systemic and integrated planning to build their resilience and capacity to address challenges such as climate change, population growth, food security, and meeting the needs of diverse communities. The **circular economy is an approach** that has gained popularity because its basic principles can be applied at various scales, and the potential benefits are broad. Unlocking the **potential of a circular economy** to generate positive environmental impacts, provide job opportunities, and support local businesses and social cohesion requires a plan. There are already leading examples of municipal planning and innovation that prove that cities are part of the solution and leading the way in this transformation.

Principles of a circular economy

1. Designing out waste and pollution;
2. Keeping products and materials in use; and
3. Regenerating natural systems.

Expectations and opportunity

Considering their core competencies such as solid waste, water management, the built environment, land use and energy management, the OECD emphasized that cities can play a well-rounded role in the circular economy by: **promoting the circular economy** and acting as a role model, **facilitating connections** and establishing multi-level governance to align priorities and policy coherence; **enabling appropriate governance conditions** by mobilizing resources and adapting regulatory frameworks and advancing public procurement and information systems¹. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation also reflects on the multi-faceted role that municipalities play and the opportunities they can harness particularly in buildings, mobility, and products ([Circular economy in cities: Policy levers](#); [The Circular Economy in Cities: resources suite](#)).

Planning, measuring and reporting

A Checklist for Action with guidance and a Scoreboard on the Governance of the Circular Economy for governments to self-assess conditions for a circular economy, identify challenges and set priorities towards a circular-economy transition is available with the report [The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions - OECD](#).

Many cities begin their circular economy journey testing new approaches through pilot projects driven by waste management objectives. For example, [A guide to catalyzing a circular economy in your community \(fcm.ca\)](#) and ICLEI USA [The Circular Pathway Starter Pack | ICLEI USA](#) promote how to get started in your community at a manageable scale.

Zero Waste Europe (ZWE) provides tools, best practices, case studies and a certification programme for zero waste cities. [Under The Zero Waste Masterplan - Zero Waste Cities](#), 13 Zero Waste Certified Cities in Europe have undergone an independent audit to verify their zero waste performance. While certification may not be suitable for every municipality, other smaller scale solutions can be pursued through ZWE programs such as Elevating Reuse in Cities, Life Biobest, and #ForkToFarm: [Zero Waste Cities - A continuous effort to phase out waste](#); [Learn - Zero Waste Cities](#).

The **best plans** are developed with input from and in collaboration with a wide range of departments, stakeholders, and communities. **A long-term system shift will eventually require a fulsome plan or a succession of plans that will act like building blocks:**

- With a clear and broad vision, goals, and measurable targets;
- A governance mechanism to coordinate across departments and engage stakeholders;
- A process to develop skilled resources and secure financial resources;
- A commitment to implement, report, adapt, and continue.

¹ OECD (2020), The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions: Synthesis Report, OECD Urban Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/10ac6ae4-en>.

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- The **city of Paris** introduced its Circular Economy Plan 2017-20, which contained 65 action proposals based on 7 strategies. Their second Roadmap was adopted in 2018.
- "**Circular Amsterdam**" was first adopted in 2016 with a focus on two sectors: construction and organic residual streams. With the renewed **Amsterdam Circular 2020-2025**, the city now aims to use 50% fewer primary raw materials by 2030 by focusing on three value chains to shape circular actions in the city: food and organic waste; consumer goods; and built environment.

On this journey, cities will encounter many challenges. **A plan can secure the engagement of various departments and establish strategies to work on:**

- Ensuring coherence across regulations, policies and programs;
- Developing synergies between areas and initiatives;
- Securing financial resources and participation of the community and businesses;
- Acquiring training and skilled resources;
- Overcoming cultural barriers;
- Collecting data to measure progress against your goals.

The Circular Economy and Innovation Unit at the **City of Toronto, Canada** formed a Working Group of 11 divisions to co-ordinate and increase the capacity to implement circular economy initiatives. The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, Spain, created a "Roundtable for the circular economy" where the City and the Metropolitan Area co-ordinate actions.

While the identification of priority areas for action is the result of both public consultations and technical studies, **targets and measurable objectives** rely on the availability of baseline data and information collection systems.

The **city of San Francisco, USA** developed a rigorous baseline from which they will measure progress of their circular economy initiatives. Such data is key to the long-term success of a plan, to get business buy-in, create awareness, and engage participation in new practices. In its report, the OECD compiled a range of possible indicators of circular economy at the local level.

Finally, cities learn best from their peers. **Many resources and networks are available** to share experiences, gain insights and inspire to take the first steps to bring about sustainable change.

- [Circular Cities and Regions Initiative | Circular Cities and Regions Initiative \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [Canadian Circular Cities](#)
- [ICLEI Circulars - ICLEI](#)
- [Circular Cities Summit 2.0 | Sustainable City Development \(circular-cities-network.org\)](#)
- Association of cities and regions for sustainable resource management ACR+: [Home \(acrplus.org\)](#)



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