



THE BUREAU OF  
**PLANNING &  
SUSTAINABILITY**



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# REUSE, REPAIR, AND SHARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW



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**START**

CONSULTING

Reduce. Reuse. Sustain.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2021

Portland, Oregon has a rich culture of reuse, repair, and share that contributes to the circular economy while reducing the City's carbon footprint. This economy welcomes nonprofits, businesses, and other organizations to thrive by reusing, repairing, and sharing materials to maximize their value and to keep them from the landfill or recycling system. Beyond creating jobs and building workforce skills, this economy provides many unseen benefits and valuable services to the Portland community.

As part of the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's (BPS) *Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy*, reuse, repair, and share organizations were invited to participate in the *Needs Assessment* project. This process included interviews, small group discussions, and surveys to evaluate the needs and current state of the reuse, repair, and share economy.

Five major needs emerged as threads throughout these conversations: space and location; racial and climate justice; communications and marketing; capacity building and staffing support; and grants and funding. Participants also provided input on the Reuse Mall concept and offered additional ways to grow the reuse, repair, and share economy in Portland.

The reuse, repair, and share economy needs ongoing support from government organizations and private industry to continue and to expand upon the highly beneficial services they provide the community. These groups should be involved early in discussions surrounding materials management to leverage their hands-on expertise for services that they have been providing for decades at little to no cost to stakeholders. Compensation for nonprofit organizations' staff time and expertise is imperative for these resource-limited environments.

There is an incredible opportunity to bring nonprofits, businesses, and government entities together to build a sustainable reuse, repair, and share economy in Portland. Syncing funding support from government and business with the knowledge of hands on organizations will have a positive impact on access to reused, repaired, and shared materials for all while reducing climate and environmental impacts.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

BPS contracted with Start Consulting Group LLC to conduct a reuse, repair, and share *Needs Assessments* as part of BPS's *Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy*. These were conducted to show how reuse and repair of materials and products decreases impacts on the environment by preventing or delaying the purchase of new items, keeping dollars circulating locally, and improves the affordability of goods. BPS's goal was to learn about the needs of reuse, repair, and share organizations, and how they could support collaboration and connection to advance the reuse, repair, and share economy in Portland and potentially invest in services and infrastructure.

Start Consulting Group LLC worked closely with Alicia Polacok of BPS, who is a strong advocate for the reuse, repair, and share community in Portland. She oversees [Resourceful PDX](#), a long-standing resource of local organizations that directs residents to upstream waste prevention/reduction options to save time and money.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

BPS is responsible for leading climate justice for the City through plans, policy, regulation, and engagement. The work to date has not accounted for the emissions of Portlanders from the purchase of food, clothes, furnishings, and electronics that are largely produced elsewhere. The emissions generated essentially double when these categories are included.

Using the *Doughnut Economics* or circular economy model, BPS is setting a new course to establish planetary boundaries for consumption and address shortfalls. Reuse, repair, and share community-led organizations help shape that economy by providing alternatives to buying new products and helping the community meet basic needs with affordable solutions.

The intention of the *Needs Assessment* process was to develop a better understanding of the current network of reuse, repair, and share services and resources, as well as the needs and opportunities from the perspective of those doing the work. Organizations shared their future visions and long-term plans for their organizations and the broader objectives of the reuse, repair, and share economy, including a potential Reuse Mall. The information included here is a first step to guide BPS decisions on where to invest staff time and resources, and where funding might be pursued to the greatest community benefit. As part of BPS's equity analysis, following this initial assessment, BPS expects to complete further engagement with BIPOC audiences who may not be served or represented in existing community-led initiatives.

A secondary project goal was to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones within the reuse, repair, and share community. BPS envisioned supporting the community through funding, storytelling, data collection, organizational connections, and matching resources with opportunities.

## METHODOLOGY

In Spring 2021, *Needs Assessment* interviews were conducted with 20 nonprofits and three other groups. Additionally, BPS and Start Consulting Group LLC spoke with Metro and DEQ staff about their role in materials management: grant funding, prioritization, and future work in this area.

Participating organizations provided information during 90-minute *Needs Assessment* interviews. The discussions included organizational needs, racial equity and climate justice, COVID-19, funding, and long-term vision and planning. Most nonprofit organizations participated in one of two small group discussion sessions. The discussions were intended to allow the nonprofits to drive the conversation and build off each other with three discussion breakout topics: funding and partnerships; Reuse Mall concept; and immediate needs. Identifying additional topics and idea sharing were key throughout the group discussions and collaborations. The final step of the process was an online survey to supply additional data on reuse, repair, and share needs.

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

### **FINDINGS AND PREVAILING THEMES**

The conversations with each participating group were robust and each organization provided thoughtful insights into their needs and the local reuse, repair, and share economy. Throughout the *Needs Assessment* interviews, five prevailing needs emerged in order of importance: space, location, and storage; equity, diversity, and inclusion; accessibility; and climate justice; communications and marketing; capacity building and staffing support; and funding and grants.

### **SPACE, LOCATION, AND STORAGE**

A significant and reoccurring theme for nonprofit organizations is the need for space. The work of preparing donations or discarded materials for reuse, repair, and share is labor and space-intensive and requires some level of storage for logistics and efficiency, as well as the ability to take advantage of larger material donation opportunities. Location-wise, some organizations are not conveniently located or depend on community partners to provide space. There is also a need for short-term and/or seasonal storage, sometimes with little notice. A flex/temporary storage solution would require a solid logistics and operations plan to create a flow of materials for participating groups, along with transportation and logistics support from government and private partners.

### **EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION; ACCESSIBILITY; AND CLIMATE JUSTICE**

#### ***Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)***

Strong racial equity and inclusion work in the reuse, repair, and share economy is needed to best serve and listen to community members for true racial and climate justice. Mission-driven nonprofits and businesses have spent decades trying to meet the needs of historically underrepresented communities. This has resulted in gentrification and not understanding the needs and wants of the communities they intended to serve. Additionally, inclusive and safe spaces for community members to share their perspectives need to be built into the system. Community members should be driving reuse, repair, and share in their neighborhoods, especially in communities that have been marginalized and excluded by these organizations and the City. They also need to be invited to participate as stakeholders and experts.

This need also encompasses internal work for organizations, namely anti-racism/anti-bias training, cultural competency, and creating accessibility. Furthermore, grant requirements for EDI statements and new programs can come at the expense of communities that have been marginalized without community-driven input. Programs need to be assessed and changed to support authentic work, especially in communities of color.

Participating organizations were at varying stages of EDI work in the *Needs Assessment* interviews. Input from these organizations shows they want to improve and change these systems, however, they are faced with challenges of balancing EDI work with their missions and concerns like the pandemic. Throughout the *Needs Assessment* process, some feedback spotlighted the need for solid support around EDI for reuse, repair, and share organizations.

Inclusive and safe spaces need to exist for community members to share their perspectives and make room for more conversations. Community members should be driving reuse, repair, and share in their neighborhoods and come in as experts and stakeholders and provided the tools and capacity to participate.

Gentrification is another concern, especially as reuse, repair, and share organizations struggle to find affordable space. Some groups have recognized their part in gentrification, especially in historically Black neighborhoods. To move to other areas with lower rent, they risk gentrifying additional areas of Portland. Some organizations expressed a tension between the need to accommodate people who can afford to purchase more items and maintaining low prices to accommodate people who depend on affordable materials.

### **Accessibility**

ADA accessibility is a large part of the space and location discussion for the reuse, repair, and share economy. In addition to challenges in leased spaces, most organizations are in need of automatic doors, ramps and other support systems to provide accessibility for all. Due to limited space, many organizations operate in cramped spaces with an overabundance of material, creating difficulties for wheelchair users or those with other assistive devices to navigate. Aside from space limitations, many organizations may struggle to meet the needs of people who are blind, deaf, or hard of hearing. Reuse, repair, and share organizations would benefit from additional support to ensure their services and locations are accessible and usable for everyone.

### **Climate Justice**

The correlation between climate justice and the reuse, repair, and share economy can be a challenge to identify and quantify because of the intrinsic nature of the work. Participants from Free Geek noted that, “In terms of climate justice, recycling [electronics] saves six pounds of gold from the landfill, but the mining impact of the exploited community is huge. The real climate impact is in reuse. By recycling, we keep \$4 [of material] out of the landfill, but with reuse, it can triple the life of a computer. That has impacts up and down the supply chain, manufacturing, shipping, packaging, overhead, etc.”

Environmental and climate justice is at the heart of reuse, repair, and share and is a collateral benefit of the work the economy already does. There is a potential to offset carbon emissions and waste by reducing the purchase of new goods and materials through sharing and repairing existing items. The reuse, repair, and share community helps Portland meet its goals for climate, waste prevention, and reuse, without the same level of support that many recycling and solid waste initiatives receive.

## **COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING**

BPS is uniquely positioned to reach many different people throughout Portland. Support from the City lends credibility to the reuse, repair, and share community and supports their ongoing

work. A cohesive marketing campaign would strengthen the economy and potentially broaden the customer and donor base with separate targeted audience messages. Organizations also expressed value in a collaborative joint marketing group (like Metro’s transportation marketing and communications group).

Each nonprofit stressed the need for communications and marketing support. Many of these organizations are struggling, especially on the tail of the pandemic, to let people know that they are open, and they need community members to purchase reused goods, not just donate their discarded materials to them. Solid investment in messaging campaigns to build the reuse, repair, and share economy and how they play a role in Portland’s sustainable future is needed. Organizations even expressed value in the City listing them on social media channels to recognize participation in the *Needs Assessment* project to show they are working towards a more sustainable Portland or promoting their work in general. Organizations felt that support and messaging from the City of Portland gave legitimacy to their work.

In addition to communications and marketing, organizations need support to affect behavior change through education and collaboration. One organization suggested that BPS support the reuse, repair, and share economy with a public education campaign illustrating the responsibility of disposal and why reuse organizations cannot accept every item donated. Behavior change can also include spreading the reuse, repair, and share culture to shift people’s relationship to their “stuff” and reframe mindsets about using borrowed tools, discarded materials, reused items, or repairing broken things.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING AND STAFFING SUPPORT**

Reuse, repair, and share organizations and businesses have little room to add staffing support or capacity to create a vision for the future of the reuse, repair, and share economy in Portland, although there is a strong desire to participate. Workforce development and capacity support from local government organizations would empower reuse, repair, and share organizations to continue to expand their sustainable work and climate justice.

Nonprofits, especially reuse, repair, and share organizations, operate on razor thin margins, and feel the impacts when catastrophes, like COVID-19, strike. Due to the pandemic, some organizations laid off employees or put strategic planning efforts on hold. There is a need for solid support and building capacity for staffing and existing programs to recover and keep reuse, repair, and share going strong in Portland. Due to these challenges, some organizations have not had the time or energy to expand their efforts and risk burnout of their staff, volunteers, and board members. Equity and inclusion practices apply at the base level to support employees with living wages and benefits. Achieving things like higher wages and benefits would make organizations even more loved and connected to the community.

## **FUNDING AND GRANTS**

Receiving grants and other funding can be time-consuming and highly competitive for many reuse, repair, and share organizations. They are often competing against each other for the same grants. Many groups struggle to find value in applying for restrictive funding for new programming. To serve applicants better and to meet operational goals of grant dollars, funders should reassess grant and funding applications to simplify the process and requirements so they are not over-burdening the fund seekers. Reuse, repair, and share organizations and businesses need access to funding that support the important work they are already doing.

Many organizations and businesses provide a valuable waste management service to Portland residents, with little to no government support and a reliance on earned income models.

These organizations often have to balance giving away free materials and items against selling items to fund their existing work. Grant funding opportunities generally require new programming and can be highly competitive. There is also a lack of staff grant writing support and a struggle to meet reporting requirements. Nonprofits would benefit from grants that are responsive to constant change and build in flexibility to meet needs where they exist, like the pandemic, and allow less reporting to satisfy grant goals.

As noted in the *EDI* section, over the last few years, grant funders have added EDI requirements. This is important and much needed, but it has the potential to create inauthentic equity drivers for groups to get funding. One nonprofit that received a grant to reach “challenged communities” stated that the program “didn’t work”. Without a strong foundational understanding of racial equity and EDI work overall, some groups could view this as just another funding mechanism with no authenticity.

## OTHER KEY AREAS

Assessment participants shared needs in other areas: collaborations and partnerships; COVID-19; policy around reuse, repair, and share; transportation and vehicle sharing; reuse and repair vouchers; data tracking and metrics; legal and human resources support; technology and software to improve their workflows; waste disposal; and creating economies of scale.

Some organizations also requested a *Needs Assessment* of community stakeholders to inform where services have the most impact. BPS can support these organizations with tracking emissions and providing research on the climate and financial impact of reuse, repair, and share organizations to include materials rescued from the waste stream and returned to the local economy.

Participants expressed enthusiasm for partnerships and collaborations with other reuse, repair, and share organizations. An outcome of the small group discussion was a plan for organizations to continue building as a collective to address the needs of the group beyond BPS’s *Needs Assessment* process. They noted that, as a collective, they could inform policy issues and build greater reuse, repair, and share incentives with government stakeholders. Organizations recognize their collective bargaining power and that they provide an essential service to the community, while helping meet local climate goals.

## REUSE MALL CONCEPT

**Note: Organizations should be compensated as this discussion progresses for the expertise and time of nonprofit staff.**

For years, the local reuse, repair, and share community has discussed the Reuse Mall concept, and they are interested in seeing a project move forward. A Reuse Mall model would allow centralized reuse, repair, and share organizations and businesses to provide services to the community while addressing the City of Portland's climate impact needs. In addition to the scale that a Reuse Mall would create, the process for donating items for reuse, repair, and share would be simplified and more accessible for the organizations and the public.

Housing reuse, repair, and share in one location would simplify material drop-offs by donors, ease of closed loop purchasing, symbiotic use of space and resources, and create economies of scale needed to build a sustainable circular economy. Additionally, a large-scale location could better meet the needs of community members. Reuse hubs or other ideas like satellite kiosks or bookmobile-style reuse and share vans could meet community needs at the local level. An intentional study of logistics, operations, and location would be needed to meet the needs of potential participants. In addition to a centralized Reuse Mall location, local, community-driven hubs would need to be located within the communities they serve. Hub activities should reflect the cultural values of the community. Staff and leadership at hubs should also represent the community.

A successful reuse, repair, and share model in Portland would require partnership between government, nonprofits, and the private sector. Government and private sector could invest in this model, while nonprofits add expertise and access to community. Local government or one organization would need to take a leadership role to pull together a coalition to actualize this concept. The organizations felt that a collective could work for operational functions, but not for leading or driving this project. If a leader does not emerge, the nonprofit organizations plan to continue to collaborate to strengthen and continue to build Portland's vibrant reuse, repair, and share community.

## CONCLUSION

Reuse, repair, and share organizations and businesses reclaim discarded materials and create markets that benefit the local economy while adding a level of accessibility and affordability for the community. There is no shortage of materials and with the support of government and private investment, these businesses and organizations could build a more robust system.

In the current system, local governments direct community members to these organizations to divert material from the waste stream, however, support is needed to "close the loop" by also advocating for the purchase of reused materials. Additionally, there is a disconnect in funding and energy that is concentrated on the landfill and recycling side, rather than the upstream systems of reuse, repair, and share. Jobs are created, the climate impact of new materials is reduced, affordable items are accessible to the community, and a sense of community is built through reuse, repair, and share initiatives. Funding to support and grow the reuse, repair, and share economy is imperative to affect meaningful change in Portland.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

BPS	BPS AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS
<p>Define the role and vision of BPS and determine what financial, marketing, and staff support the City will commit to the reuse, repair, and share economy.</p>	<p>Fund training to support nonprofits with racial equity and inclusion strategies, de-escalation training, and trauma-informed care.</p>
<p>Compensate organizations for their time and expertise. Build capacity for them to participate in the broader reuse, repair, and share vision.</p>	<p>Include and tap into the expertise of reuse, repair, and share nonprofits and organizations with policy and planning around reuse, repair, share, and beyond.</p>
<p>Refocus priority and investment from landfill and recycling systems to support the reuse, repair, and share economy as the first option.</p>	<p>Determine if the region is thoughtfully invested in creating a Reuse Mall model. Create actions to provide real support to the region's reuse, repair, and share community and economy.</p>
<p>Prioritize support for organizations with missions that are primarily driven by reuse, repair, and share.</p>	<p>Assist reuse, repair, and share organizations with a wage and benefits analysis and use the data to support increased wages and benefits.</p>
<p>Provide data and climate research to inform the work on reuse, repair, and share in Portland.</p>	<p>Build communication strategies with Metro, DEQ, county sustainability departments, and reuse, repair, and share stakeholders to support and grow the reuse, repair, and share economy.</p>
<p>Ensure systems are in place to include and listen to community members as stakeholders and experts, especially communities of color.</p>	<p>Seek input from organizational staff and volunteers, not just Executive Directors, managers, and board members.</p>
<p>Create a plan to use non-fiscal resources to support the reuse, repair, and share organizations, especially with marketing and communications.</p>	<p>Track emissions and provide research on the climate and financial impact of reuse, repair, and share. Include materials rescued from the waste stream and put back into the local economy.</p>



**Thank you to all the organizations that participated in the Needs Assessment Process and sharing your expertise. Special thanks to Alicia Polacok with BPS for her vision and passion for reuse, repair, and share.**

**Nonprofit Organizations**

Bike Works by p:ear  
Central City Concern Reuse Operations Center  
The City Repair Project  
Community Cycling Center  
Community Warehouse/Estate Store  
Free Geek  
Green Lents Community Tool Library  
Habitat for Humanity ReStore  
Kitchen Commons (Kitchen Share NE)  
Kitchen Share SE  
Northeast Portland Tool Library  
ReBuilding Center  
ReClaim It!  
Repair PDX  
Schoolhouse Supplies  
SCRAP Creative Reuse  
Southeast Portland Tool Library  
St. Johns Swapnplay  
Trash for Peace/Ground Score

**Other Organizations**

Oregon DEQ  
Metro  
Portland Repair Finder  
Ridwell  
Sankofa Lumber  
The Thingery



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