

Circular Economy Accelerator Program Moves the Needle on Vancouver Island

VANCOUVER ISLAND – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 7, 2023 – The [Circular Economy Accelerator Program](#) concluded its pilot last month, spurring the transition to a sustainable, resilient economy and positioning Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast as leaders in the circular economy. The program – the first of its kind in Canada – was designed to support businesses who seek to adopt circular economy principles, reduce waste and emissions, and develop innovative practices while increasing revenue and reducing operational costs.

The program was comprised of three components:

1. Site assessments and comprehensive reports for 16 businesses north of the Malahat on Vancouver Island and on the Sunshine Coast
2. A four-part webinar series
3. A circular economy business guide

Site assessments were conducted with circular advisors to identify circular solutions for each business' operations across eight different areas, from internal and external reuse to leadership and training. Each business participant received a report outlining key opportunities to adopt circular economy principles and reduce waste, energy use, and emissions.

Cumulatively, 714 circular opportunities were identified, which, if adopted, have the potential to conserve 22,565m³ of water, reduce green house gas (GHG) emissions by 1,098 tCO₂e, and divert 288,844 kg of waste from landfill.

One such participant is Gabriola Island's [Ground Up Café and Catering](#). Their location on a small island has driven innovative waste diversion practices that have helped them achieve a 97% waste diversion rate from landfill. In addition to sourcing ingredients from local producers and returning their coffee bags to supplier for reuse, they offer a comprehensive waste diversion station, donate coffee grounds to a local farmer, compost all food scraps, and have implemented a reusable cup program with [The Nulla Project](#).

The accompanying Circular Economy Webinar Series was designed to feature best practices gleaned from site visits. Three of the webinars were aimed at the most heavily represented sectors in the program – tourism and hospitality, food and beverage processing, and construction and manufacturing – with the fourth webinar aimed at local government. The webinars attracted 236 registrants from across 19 countries.

The publicly available guide, [A Business' Guide to the Circular Economy](#), was also based off findings from the site visits, and features circular economy best practices, case studies from the program, and resources that will support other businesses seeking circular solutions.

The program was delivered by the Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association (VICEDA) in partnership with the Synergy Foundation with support from Island Coastal Economic Trust and VICEDA regional partners, including the City of Campbell River, City of Nanaimo, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce, Municipality of North Cowichan, City of Port Alberni, and Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Organization.

Synergy Foundation and VICEDA are currently exploring opportunities for Phase 2 of the Circular Economy Accelerator Program. **Those interested in participating in the program or bringing the program to their region can contact Amrit Manhas at amrit.manhas@nanaimo.ca.**

For more details on the program, read the [accompanying Final Report](#).

What is the circular economy?

The circular economy is an economic system that eliminates pollution and waste by retaining resources and manufactured goods within the system through innovation, reuse and repair, redistribution, recondition, and recycling processes, all of which are powered by renewable energy. These principles have been integral to traditional ways of life for Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial and align with natural processes. Transitioning from the current “take-make-waste” linear model to a circular economy reduces emissions, waste, and virgin resource demand while enabling affordable lifestyles and green job creation, and can provide a 4.5 trillion dollar value worldwide by 2030¹.

Quotes

“The process of pulling together all of our inputs has been extremely helpful. We work in the renewable forestry industry which is poised to become one of BC’s best tools in combatting climate change. Our circularity assessment now gives us baselines and recommendations to start somewhere. We now know where we are and want to be part of the change in industry that is gaining momentum.

- Mark Brackett, Project Team Lead, West Coast Pre Fab

“The Accelerator program has sparked real progress in the transition to a circular economy. It has fostered collaboration, innovation, and effective partnerships that will continue to catalyze change throughout Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and beyond.”

- Amrit Manhas, Treasurer, Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association

Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association

The Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association (VICEDA) was established in 1996 to foster engagement and involvement in the vast economic development activities in the region. Members meet at least quarterly, and benefit from industry knowledge sharing, ongoing resources including funding opportunities, and special events intended to encourage networking and growth of the Vancouver Island and Coast economy.

Synergy Foundation

Synergy Foundation is a non-profit with a mission to activate change, spark innovation and share ideas to steer our economy and communities towards a more regenerative future. Since its inception in 2013, Synergy has focused on innovative projects and programs that have pushed the envelope, supported hundreds of businesses, and turned great ideas into action.

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