



April 4, 2024

Technical Memo #3 Repair Café Support



TO:	Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee (RSWAC)	TO RSWAC:	April 4, 2024
FROM:	Abby McLennan Environmental Consultant	TO BOARD:	Future date
COMPANY:	Let's Talk Trash	FILE:	5360-30 SWMP

Strategy Description

Repair Cafés were identified during Step 2 of the Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) renewal public consultation process as one of the key actions residents felt should be considered. This grassroots movement aims to reduce waste, curb consumption, combat planned obsolescence, and foster regional resilience.

Repair Cafés are a concept that originated in the Netherlands in 2009 and offer a low-barrier entry point for community participation into the circular economy. These events are usually free to attend and are often held in a public and accessible space that is equipped with tools and supplies where individuals, assisted by skilled volunteers, can repair or mend everyday items such as electronics, appliances, computers, bicycles, and clothing. Repair Cafés encourage a shift in perspective, viewing waste as a resource, something that has value, rather than a mere cost or burden. The social pillar of sustainability is also addressed within this strategy through sharing multi-generational skills and knowledge that help build community and can contribute positive economic impacts for residents by saving money through repair and by not having to buy new. The best way to reduce waste going to the landfill is to not create it in the first place. Refusing and reducing are the most effective ways to divert waste and participate in a circular economy.

Applicable Guiding Principles

- ✓ Promote and support zero waste approaches and support a circular economy
- ✓ Promote the first 7 R's – Refuse, Rethink, Redesign, Reduce, Re-use, Repair and Recycle.

The prevalent take-make-dispose model is exerting tremendous pressure on the environment, communities, and public health. To address this impact, a pivotal shift toward waste prevention and diversion is imperative. Supporting a circular model that embraces practices such as reuse, repair, refurbish, remanufacture, repurpose, recycle, and compost empowers community members to actively contribute to the principles of a circular economy. This transformative model represents a departure from the linear approach, playing a crucial role in mitigating the environmental repercussions associated with traditional solid waste disposal.

At the core of the circular economy approach is the idea of extending the lifespan of products. This conserves resources, diverts materials from landfills and reintegrates them into the production cycle whenever possible. In this circular paradigm, nothing is considered waste.

Current methods of resource extraction, processing, landfilling, and recycling have significant impacts on the region's environmental footprint. Embracing a circular economy approach minimizes these impacts, promoting sustainability and a regenerative approach to managing solid waste.

Repair Café International reports over 3,000 Repair Cafés are taking place globally. Among the repair community, there are free resources available for open-sourced tips, tricks, and repair guides to support these events. The Repair Café strategy exemplifies an accessible way for communities to actively contribute to a more sustainable and circular approach when items appear to reach end-of-life.

Goals of the Repair Café:

1. To bring back repair into local society in an inclusive and collective way;
2. To maintain and grow repair expertise, skills and knowledge;
3. To promote social cohesion in the local community by connecting a diverse variety of residents together through an inspiring and low-key event that aims to reduce waste;
4. To extend the life of products and reduce waste.

Educational Benefits of Repair Cafes

Although this strategy doesn't produce high yielding diversion impacts due to the limitations on the number of items that can be repair per event, and acknowledging that many of the items brought in for repair are part of existing recycling programs, it promotes a shift in behaviour. This approach offers tools to prolong an item's lifespan, promotes valuing natural resources, advocates for reduced consumption, initiates discourse on repairable purchases, and educates

residents on recycling options for irreparable items. These repair hubs connect members of the community together and place value on an array of skills from textile repair to electrical and mechanical know how. Gathering skilled volunteers to assist with repair is an actionable way to transfer and preserve skills and knowledge and build a more resilient society. Repair Cafés also promote the purchasing of more repairable products as consumers' awareness grows and a deeper understanding of product design and functionality are developed. These co-benefits can be taken into consideration when evaluating diversion metrics associated with Repair Cafés.

CSWM Background

In 2019 the first Repair Cafés took place in Courtenay and then paused during COVID-19. In 2022, the CSWM Community Educator once again started working with various organizations within the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and Strathcona Regional District (SRD) to support Repair Café events through a variety of ways:

- Provides event organizational assistance;
- Supplies resource material that includes a general guide on how to run a repair café in addition to an excel file to aid with planning that provides prompts on what to do 2 months before, 1 month before, and then weekly and during the event;
- Issues communications and assists with managing volunteer 'fixers' if required;
- Provides posters, an event sandwich board, registration forms for the event, data tracking forms and a large print out of 'House Rules' that everyone attending must read and agree to; and
- Coordination with CSWM Curriculum Educator to assist with the creation of a 'tinker station' to engage children.

Since 2022, hundreds of participants have attended these events and hundreds of items have been repaired. The 2022 Repair Café recorded 77 items that were repaired and following year, 140 items were repaired with the event having to turn people away. Last year, the Cumberland Repair Café recorded 50 items fixed and Quadra Island's event that focused on garden tool sharpening, recorded 35 items as repaired. On average, about 78% of items being brought to CSWM Repair Cafés are able to be repaired. Repair Cafés have taken place in Courtenay, Cumberland, Campbell River and on Denman and Quadra Islands.

Repair Cafés on Denman and Quadra Islands came about organically as these residents attended an event in Campbell River and Courtenay, became engaged, activated a local organization on the island and set out to host their own event through the guidance and support of the CSWM Community Educator.

The City of Campbell River hosts an annual Repair Café with municipal staff taking on all logistics associated with event coordination and planning. In 2023, their event recorded 126 items repaired. At this event the CSWM Community Educator was present with an information table and was able to focus on disseminating waste related material and conversing with residents.

The 2024 Community Educator work plan outlines providing support and assistance for one Repair Café in each of the following communities; Courtenay, Cumberland, Campbell River, Gold River, Tahsis, Denman Island and Quadra Island.

Jurisdiction Scan

Within BC, many communities are participating in Repair Cafés through a variety of approaches. To gain further insight, a number of other jurisdictions were reviewed to evaluate how other regions are supporting Repair Cafés.

The most common approach observed through an initial scan is a community organization acting as the main coordinator of the event with some financial support being provided by the local government. In larger jurisdictions, such as Metro Vancouver, a government to government cost sharing approach is seen. Various sponsorships are another approach where a portion of funds coming from the local government are supplemented with additional funds or in-kind support from other communities’ entities. Event hosts can vary from community organizations to local government as well as a blend of these two.

These events are noted to be labour intensive in recruiting volunteer ‘fixers’, who often come equipped with tools, as well as requiring a handful of additional volunteers to help staff and to facilitate the event. Due to this workload, it is noted that partnering with a community organization appears to be the preferred approach.

A summary from this initial inquiry is outlined below.

Table 1 Jurisdictional Review of Repair Café Frequency and Funding

Region	Host	Frequency	Timing	Funding
Kamloops	Transition Kamloops & Kamloops Makerspace	4x a year	10am – 3pm Weekday & Weekends	Grant

100 Mile House	100 Mile Repair Café	Monthly	11am – 3pm Fridays & Weekends	Cariboo Regional District
Port Coquitlam	Rotary	Monthly	10am – 2pm Weekends	City of PoCo & Rotary
Maple Ridge	Ridge Meadows Recycling Society	Monthly	10am – 2pm Weekends	Sponsorships
Richmond	City of Richmond	Monthly	10am – 2pm Weekends	City of Richmond & Metro Vancouver
Vancouver	Society Promoting Environmental Conservation	Piloting 9 Cafés in 2024	9:30am – 1:30pm Weekends	City of Vancouver & Metro Vancouver
Squamish	Squamish Climate Action Network & District of Squamish	2x a year	Oct and May 9 am to 1 pm	District of Squamish
North Saanich	Graham Barbour	Monthly	10am – 1pm Weekends	United Church & Home Hardware
Capital Regional District (CRD)	Various organizations	1+/year	Varies	CRD provides grants up to \$3000

Options for Implementation

Strategy 3a: Maintain Current Repair Café Support

Existing support includes providing assistance through the CSWM Community and Curriculum Educator to support five to six Repair Café events throughout the service area annually.

Improvements to the CSWM website will be made to provide additional support and resources for residents wanting to learn more about repair and how to access skilled trades and or attend Repair Café events. In addition, building on the ReCollect app of providing information on how to recycle products at end of life, repair options can be added to the responses to provide residents alternatives. Staff will continue to advocate for Right to Repair policy and strengthened regulations nationally and provincially.

Operational and Staffing Impacts Anticipated

This strategy would not require a significant change in current operational and staffing time as current levels would be maintained.

Estimate of Diversion Impact

The diversion impact is estimated to be low with the assumption that the majority of items being brought in for repair likely fit into existing recycling programs. Textiles are the exception and add a new diversion potential within this strategy.

Financial Implications

The total cost to maintain this current level of service has been budgeted within the existing 2024 CSWM Educators' contracts. Costs include consumable supplies such as glue, tape, sewing supplies and other small items that comes out of the general event supplies budget.

Regulatory Authority Required

There is no specific service that would need to be established to execute this strategy.

Diversion Potential

Low

100's of items repaired to date

Operational Impacts

Low

Maintain current operational and staffing levels

Financial Implications

N/A

No increase in costs or assets owned by CSWM

Strategy 3b: Repair Café Event Coordination Grants

A growing trend with Repair Cafés is working in collaboration with community groups and organizations to decrease the workload associated with coordination of these events. By leveraging these partnerships, local volunteer coordinators and 'fixers' can be recruited, and access to tools, equipment, and supplies can be facilitated. Additionally, event outreach communications can be substantially amplified through the networks of these organizations.

Introducing a financial grant to support organizations aiding the Community Educator in these tasks holds potential to augment the available resources while leveraging overall efforts through these networks.

Offering grants can increase the willingness to participate. Developing deeper partnerships with local groups and organizations over time, greatly expands the Community Educator's outreach abilities. This expanded reach is vital for engaging diverse communities and garnering support for Repair Cafés. It helps address the challenge of recruiting skilled volunteers, which is crucial for these events. Grants can act as a catalyst for collaboration, allowing the single Community Educator to transcend geographical limitations and establish meaningful connections with various communities and demographics within the CSWM region. Grants could also be used to support intergenerational learning and to build skills in younger fixers, recruiting from North Island College or high schools.

Integrating and working more collaboratively with community groups could open new pathways of accessibility to increase participation and diversion. For example, a pickup/drop off service could be explored to offer the transport of larger items to assist residents without access to vehicles and elderly or mobility challenged populations with the caveat that the person could get themselves to the event. Options could be expanded to allow for the pick up/drop off of items without the presence of the person in extenuating circumstances. Through the use of technology, an expansion to accessibility could also involve residents being able to virtually join and attempt to have a 'fixer' guide them through making their repair.

Financial grants can increase volunteerism through a variety of ways:

- 1. Recognition and Appreciation:** Offering financial support demonstrates recognition and appreciation for time and effort. It acknowledges the value of the contribution, often resulting in motivation for continued service.
- 2. Incentive and Motivation:** Financial grants serve as tangible incentives, providing volunteers and organizations with a direct reward for their commitment. This can motivate individuals to participate and remain engaged.
- 3. Addressing Economic Barriers:** Many individuals may want to volunteer but face economic constraints that limit their ability to do so. Offering grants can help overcome these barriers, making volunteering accessible to a broader range of people and promoting inclusivity as well providing financial assistance for potential expenses that may be incurred (ie. space rental fees,

complimentary lunch for volunteers, fuel cost reimbursement for cube van pickup service, consumables such as glue, blades, drill bits, parts, etc).

4. Time Commitment: Volunteering often requires a significant time commitment, and individuals may be hesitant to dedicate substantial hours without any form of compensation. Grants can help offset the opportunity cost of volunteering, making it more feasible for individuals with busy schedules.

5. Promoting Sustainable Volunteerism: While many volunteers and organizations are motivated by altruism, financial grants can contribute to the sustainability of volunteer programs. By recognizing the practical needs of volunteers and organizations, providing some financial assistance can ensure a consistent and stable pool of volunteers and support over the long-term. This can also result in an increased frequency of events, leading to more people holding onto items for repair rather than opting to replace it and increase diversion.

Operational and Staffing Impacts Anticipated

This strategy would not require a significant change in current operational and staffing time as current levels would be maintained and enhanced through a more formal partnership with local groups and organizations. Additional time would be required to evaluate grant applications, review final reports and record captured data.

Estimate of Diversion Impact

The estimated diversion potential is low, though anticipated to be higher than Strategy 3a. Anticipating low diversion impacts takes into consideration the majority of items being brought in for repair likely fit into existing recycling programs. Textiles are estimated to be the larger new diversion potential within this strategy. A requirement of the support would be the need to report data on the effectiveness of the event in diverting products and participation.

Financial Implications

The District of Squamish provides \$1,110 as a coordinator stipend for assisting with the coordination of each event and budgets \$150 per event to provide lunch for volunteers.

The Capital Regional District (CRD) provides up to \$3,000 through a 'Rethink Waste Community Grant' program which provides funding for the development and implementation of community-based projects that aligns with the 5R pollution prevention hierarchy (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recovery & Residuals Management) outlined in CRD's [Solid Waste Management Plan](#). This grant does not specifically target Repair Cafés but these are eligible projects that can be applied for. Application forms can be found on the CRD's website and are processed on a

first come, first serve basis throughout the year with limited funds available. To assist with data collection, these grants require information on waste reduction and one of the requirements of the final report is for applicants to share achievements of their projects such as metrics for waste diversion and community engagement.

It is suggested to pilot grants in the amount of \$500-\$2,500 for a maximum of \$10,000 available for total grant funds for the year.

Regulatory Authority Required

There is no specific service that would need to be established to execute this strategy.

Diversion Potential

Low

Promotes sustainable volunteerism

Operational Impacts

Low

Maintain current operational and staffing levels

Financial Implications

Low

\$10,000 in grants. No increase in assets owned by CSWM

Strategy 3c: Repair Café Toolkits

Common tools and supplies are utilized at each event. Investing in a basic set of supplies and consumables into a consolidated, portable and organized system can facilitate and streamline the coordination of events.

Operational and Staffing Impacts Anticipated

This strategy would not require a significant change in current operational and staffing time as current levels would be maintained.

Estimate of Diversion Impact

The diversion impact is estimated to be low.

Financial Implications

The total cost estimate for the creation of a toolkit is estimated to be \$1,000 per kit, two kits are suggested to ensure support across the region. Kits would not include power tools but would include consumables such as glue guns, various glues, duct tape, silicon mats, voltage tester, bike pump, rubber patches, thread, basic sewing kit, pliers, various screwdrivers, drill bits, clamps, utility knife, buckets, rags, various nuts, screws, bolts, nails, power cords, extension cords, soldering gun, safety glasses, gloves, etc. Other valuable additions would be large

durable signage to direct people to ‘fixers’ (i.e. labeling electronics, appliances, and textiles repair people or stations) easels and sandwich boards signs to assist facilitation hosts and promote an event.

Regulatory Authority Required

There is no specific service that would need to be established to execute this strategy.

Diversion Potential

Low

Operational Impacts

Low

Maintain current operational and staffing levels

Financial Implications

Low

\$2,000 in upfront costs, \$500 annually in consumables.

Summary of Strategic Actions

Table 2 Strategy Summary Table

Strategy	Diversion Potential	Ops. & Staffing	Financial Impact	Comments
3a. Maintain Current Repair Café Support	Low	Low	N/A	Within existing budget
3b. Repair Café Event Coordination Grants	Low	Low	Low	Up to \$10,000 of grant funding provided annually
3c. Repair Café Toolkits	Low	Low	Low	\$2,000 initial, \$500 annually

Repair cafés offer a multifaceted approach to sustainability, encompassing environmental, economic, and social benefits. They provide tangible solutions to the challenges posed by a throwaway culture while fostering a sense of community and resourcefulness. Continuing to

support this strategy also allows for a more thorough pulse on collecting data from these events in terms of participants, number of items repaired and diversion statistics.