

(OPCE) Toolkit

ORCHESTRATING PLACE-BASED CIRCULAR ECOSYSTEMS

Using the GROW Framework:
Goal – Reality – Options – Will

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Toolkit

Using the GROW Framework: Goal–Reality–Options–Will

This toolkit is a participatory guide for mapping, imagining, and strengthening local circular ecosystems. It draws on the GROW model — Goal, Reality, Options, Will — to support inclusive, place-based circular ecosystem building and collaboration.

You can adapt this guide for different sectors of the circular economy, such as textiles, construction, food, electronics, and more. Prompts can be adjusted to suit your local context, geography, and stakeholder mix.

How to Navigate

Each stage of the **GROW** model corresponds to one section of this toolkit:

Stage Focus Guiding Question

G — Goal: Clarify your circular ambition, where do we want to go?

R — Reality: Understand your current local circular ecosystem, where are we now?

O — Options: Explore new possibilities, what could we do?

W — Will: Commit to action and learning, how will we make it happen?

Our Shared Intention

The purpose of this toolkit is not to prescribe solutions but to spark meaningful conversations about circular change in your local context.

Use it to:

- Surface shared values and tensions.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Design actions that are bold, inclusive, and grounded in place.
- Circular ecosystems thrive when everyone has a role — this toolkit helps you discover yours and connect with others in this ecosystem.



You can use the toolkit as:

A stand-alone workbook to guide a multi-stakeholder coalition, a network or a group of circular enthusiastic organisations, local authorities, community interest organisations, social enterprises, upcyclers, designers, and recyclers that are setting up a local ecosystem.

The toolkit is adaptable

modify the examples and questions to suit your sector (textiles, construction, food, electronics, etc.) or scale (neighbourhood, city, or region).



GOAL SETTING

Clarify Your Circular Ambition

Identify Your Current Reality

To begin, it's important to get clear on what success looks like in your local circular ecosystem.

Reflect individually or as a group on questions such as:

- What does a thriving circular system look like in your neighbourhood, city, or region?
- Which values and impacts matter most to you — regeneration, community wellbeing, local jobs, environmental restoration?
- Are you aiming for incremental improvements or a systemic transformation that reshapes the way resources flow?
- Which principles or ethics guide your decisions in developing this place based circular ecosystem?
- How does your circular ambition align with broader agendas such as Net Zero, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or the Just Transition?
- How does your 'place' enable or hinder the local circular ecosystem you are aiming to establish?

 **Tip:** Use this stage to be ambitious but realistic. Dream big, but also consider the resources, capabilities, and partners you have today.

Confront Tensions

Every ecosystem has inherent dilemmas. Use these prompts to reflect on potential trade-offs:

Ambition vs Capacity

Are your goals bold yet achievable?

Local Identity vs Global Fit — Are global circularity challenges reflected or resolved through your local context?

Innovation vs Tradition

Can you introduce new circular practices without losing the strengths of existing systems?

Collaboration vs Competition

How do you balance shared vision with individual organisational priorities?

Get Started: Mapping and Reflection

Here are practical ways to turn reflection into actionable planning:

Draft a Place-Based Circular Purpose Statement:
Summarise in one or two sentences why your local circular ecosystem exists and what it seeks to achieve.

Use Imagination Prompts:

What if we had shared repair hubs or community material libraries?

What if peer-to-peer reuse platforms were widely adopted?

What if local reverse logistics allowed materials to flow efficiently between businesses?

How could collaborative networks between households, local enterprises, and councils transform our resources?

 **Tip:** Use this stage to be ambitious but realistic. Dream big, but also consider the resources, capabilities, and partners you have today.

CONFRONT TENSIONS

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas



Identify Your Current Reality

To design effective circular systems, it's crucial to understand where you stand today. Use these prompts to map your position and role:

- **Your role:** Where do you sit within your local circular ecosystem? Are you a producer, facilitator, connector, or conscious citizen?
- **Connections:** Who do you interact with regularly in your locale? Who relies on you, and who do you rely on for information, resources, or support?
- **Flows:** What moves through your part of the circular system? Which of these flows are within the boundaries of your 'place' and which are out of your placial boundaries? Consider materials, energy, knowledge, waste, funding, or services.
- **Capacity:** What resources, skills, and influence do you currently have in this local circular ecosystem?
- **Reach:** How far do your actions or influence extend within the ecosystem?

Confront Tensions

Every ecosystem has trade-offs and challenges. Reflect on the following tensions:

Formal vs Informal

Are grassroots groups or informal actors recognised and resourced adequately?

Centralised vs Community-led Who holds decision-making power? Is it concentrated or distributed?

Local vs External Influence

Are external stakeholders dominating, or is local knowledge driving solutions?

Efficiency vs Inclusivity

Are processes streamlined but potentially leaving smaller actors out?

Take action to make the ecosystem visible and understandable:

Map key actors, relationships, and flows
Use a diagram, table, or network map to show connections, dependencies, and resource flows.

Identify gaps

- Which actors are underrepresented?
- What relationships or connections are missing?
- Which flows are broken, inefficient, or at risk?

Facilitate a group discussion

- Who is not represented in the ecosystem?
- What is being overlooked or undervalued?
- Which flows, relationships, or functions are critical but fragile?



CONFRONT TENSIONS

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas

ECOSYSTEM MAPPING SPACE

Use the space below to sketch your local circular ecosystem. Include actors, relationships, material/knowledge flows, and missing connections.



OPTIONS

Explore New Possibilities

Identify Opportunities and Barriers

Once you understand your current reality, the next step is to explore what could be possible. Reflect on these questions:

Barriers: What is preventing your place-based circular ecosystem from thriving? Examples include:

- Lack of funding, infrastructure, or tools
- Policy or regulatory gaps
- Skills or knowledge shortages
- Cultural or behavioural barriers

Enablers: What existing strengths could accelerate progress? Examples include:

- Motivated community groups or entrepreneurs
- Strong local networks
- Access to space, materials, or technology
- Supportive policies or initiatives

Missing actors: Which roles are absent, underrepresented, or disconnected? Why are they missing, and how could they be engaged?

Circular actions: What specific initiatives, processes, or systems could unlock value in your place-based circular ecosystem? Examples:

- Shared repair hubs or material libraries
- Take-back schemes or peer-to-peer reuse platforms
- Local composting or recycling networks

Education, training, or awareness campaigns

Confront Tensions

As you explore options, consider potential dilemmas:

Scalability vs Local Fit

Can actions grow without losing local relevance or value?

Equity vs Efficiency

Are smaller actors and communities included, or are benefits concentrated?

Bold Change vs Practical Steps

Are solutions ambitious yet feasible?

Group Exercise

For each R-strategy on the following page discuss and record:

Who is needed?

What relationships must be built or strengthened?

Is this R-strategy already happening locally?

Who is doing it?

Can it be scaled, supported, or connected to other initiatives?

💡 **Tip:** Don't limit yourself — list both small quick wins and long-term possibilities. Even ideas that feel ambitious are valuable.



CONFRONT TENSIONS

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas



OPTIONS

Explore New Possibilities

Use the R-strategies* to explore circular possibilities in your context. Consider each one and conduct a multi-stakeholder group exercise.

R#	Strategy	Key Question
R0	Refuse	As a local ecosystem, how can we meet the need without making this product/service, and which actors can provide viable alternatives (sharing, service models, policy levers)?
R1	Rethink	How will designers, producers, retailers, repairers, and communities co-design for durability, modularity, and shared use—and what specific commitments will each make?
R2	Reduce	What joint actions (procurement standards, process efficiencies, behavior-change campaigns) will we implement to cut material and energy use across our area?
R3	Reuse	Which partners will enable redistribution/second-hand locally, and what infrastructure, policies, and incentives do we need to extend product lifetimes?
R4	Repair	How do we make repair accessible, visible, and valued here—skills, venues, right-to-repair support, affordable parts—and who leads and funds this?
R5	Refurbish	What collaborations will bring products back to “as-new” quality at scale (collection, triage, warranties), and how will we assure safety and trust?
R6	Remanufacture	Can local firms recover components and feed them into new products; what standards, reverse-logistics, and contracting are required?
R7	Repurpose	How can creative, community, and industrial actors matchmake surplus parts and materials into new uses, and what design support unlocks this?
R8	Recycle	Do we have robust, low-loss sorting/collection/recycling locally? If not, what partnerships and investments will build it, and how will we track value retained?
R9	Recover	Where recycling isn’t viable, how will we responsibly recover residual value (e.g., composting, bioenergy) while protecting health, environment, and social outcomes—and who ensures oversight in our place?

Note: The 9R circular strategies framework used in this table is adapted and synthesised from prior formulations (Muñoz et al., 2024; Zorpat et al., 2021).

ACTION SPACE

R-Strategy	Actions	Who's Needed	Relationships/Partnerships	Already Happening?	Notes / Reflections
R0 Refuse					
R1 Rethink					
R2 Reduce					
R3 Reuse					
R4 Repair					
R5 Refurbish					
R6 Remanufacture					
R7 Recycle					
R8 Recover					



WILL

Commit to Action, Coordination & Learning

Identify Responsibilities and Structures

Once goals are set, reality mapped, and options explored, the next step is turning ideas into action. Reflect on these questions:

Coordination: Who will take responsibility for leading, holding space, or driving momentum in this place-based ecosystem?

Rituals and Routines: What regular meetings, forums, or review sessions will keep this ecosystem connected, learning, and evolving?

Celebrating Success: How can you recognise progress, share stories, and build public trust in this ecosystem?

Adaptability: Are we as stakeholders of this ecosystem prepared to pivot if something doesn't work as expected?

Shared Ownership: How will responsibility be distributed so no single actor is overburdened?

💡 Tip: Assigning clear roles and routines early prevents confusion and keeps energy focused on impact.



Confront Tensions

As you commit to action, consider the following dilemmas, these are for reflection, not obstacles:

Action vs Avoidance

Are difficult decisions being delayed due to discomfort?

Ownership vs Stewardship

Is momentum driven by an individual or shared across the ecosystem?

Boldness vs Caution

Are you willing to exit legacy systems that no longer serve this ecosystem?

Timeframe Action Plan

Plan actions across short, medium, and long-term to ensure continuity and scalability.

Timeframe	Focus	Examples of Activities
Quick Wins (0–1 year)	Pilot projects and small-scale action	Community mapping, small prototypes, storytelling, local repair events
Mid-Term (1–3 years)	Strengthen shared infrastructure	Recurring repair/reuse days, circular training hubs, collaborative logistics systems
Long-Term (3–10 years)	Structural change	Policy frameworks, permanent circular hubs, cultural and curriculum shifts, scaling successful pilots

CONFRONT TENSIONS

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas

LEARNING & REFLECTION LOOP LANDSCAPE

Create a simple table or diagram to capture experiments, lessons learned, and next steps.

Continuous learning is key to a resilient ecosystem. Use this loop to track progress, adapt, and scale impact: What did we try?, What worked well?, What didn't work — and why?, What should we do next?

Congratulations!

You've now worked through the GROW framework:

G — Goal: Clarified your circular ambition.

R — Reality: Mapped your current ecosystem and roles.

O — Options: Explored new possibilities and R-strategies.

W — Will: Committed to action, learning, and coordination.

This toolkit is a starting point — circular ecosystem building is iterative and evolving, so continue to revisit each stage as your community, city, or organisation develops.

Next Steps & Resources

- Schedule review points every 6–12 months.
- Use the Learning & Reflection Loop to continuously adapt your collective circular ecosystem strategies.
- Share your success stories and challenges to inspire collaboration locally and beyond.
- Explore additional resources, toolkits, or case studies to enhance your ecosystem.

Remember: Circular ecosystems thrive when everyone has a role, every action counts, and learning is continuous. Keep this toolkit handy, revisit it often, and use it to guide.

Whats Next?

Interested in follow-up support or customising the toolkit for your organisation?

Contact the ORCHESTRATE project principal investigators, Dr Tulin

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We can offer:

- Workshops to facilitate use of the toolkit across local and regional stakeholders that are aiming to initiate, develop, provide momentum and drive for place based circular ecosystems.
- Custom interventions tailored to your sector, priorities, and ecosystem context.
- Guidance on mapping, ecosystem thinking, and reflections for considering an alternative future on your circular ecosystem.
- Support in framing circular ecosystem strategy in alignment with the regional or local context.

OPCE Toolkit: Orchestrating Place-Based Circular Ecosystems

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