BETTER BUILDINGS PARTNERSHIP

BBP circular procurement best practice guideline

Embedding circularity in your organisation

thinkstep anz

Created by thinkstep-anz on behalf of The Better Buildings Partnership

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We at the Better Buildings Partnerships recognise the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise their continuous connection to lands, skies and waters.

Australia's First People are the world's oldest continuous living culture, and Australia's first practitioners of sustainability. They have shaped the built environment for millennia with purpose-built architecture that responds to the unique character and challenges of the landscape. The Better Buildings Partnerships, together with partners Green Building Council of Australia and Aurecon recognise the power of the built environment to shape a future that cares for both people and planet.

The choices we make today matter for the future of tomorrow.

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the guide

This guide has been developed to assist property owners, managers, and tenants to improve the performance and sustainability of their buildings by embedding circularity principles in procurement.

The guide is an initiative of the Better Buildings Partnership (BBP), a collaboration of leading property owners and industry influencers providing green leadership and sustainable innovation for Sydney's commercial and public buildings. It aligns with international circularity standards and other local initiatives designed to improve circularity in buildings and organisations.[1]

This is intended to be an introduction to the topic rather than a source of detailed information. There are many other useful resources available on specific strategies, and these are referenced and linked throughout the document.

1.2. What is a circular economy, and why is it important?

The circular economy is a systemic approach that maintains a circular flow of resources by recovering, retaining or adding to their value while contributing to sustainable development.

In a circular economy, social and economic growth is decoupled from resource consumption by maintaining, reusing, refurbishing, remanufacturing, and recycling assets and consumables and using responsibly sourced materials.

By adopting these principles of a circular economy, businesses seek to use resources more efficiently and deliver economic, social and environmental benefits. These may include:

Economic benefits
- → Retention and recovery of the economic value in products and materials
- → Continued access to critical resources, minimising exposure to price volatility

Social benefits
- → Additional job opportunities in circular businesses (and potential job losses in others)[2]
- → Enhanced equity through more affordable access to resources and products

Environmental benefits
- → Reduced carbon emissions, water stress, biodiversity loss and pollution
- → Improved management of natural resources to improve the resilience of ecosystems.

[1] Relevant standards and local initiatives are listed in Section 5.
[2] Research by Charitable Reuse Australia estimated reuse generates 25 times more jobs than recycling and 81 times more than landfill on a per tonne basis.

1.3. What does this mean for procurement?

Organisations can help drive a circular economy by insisting on circular products and using, maintaining, and recovering them in a circular manner. Using circular principles in procurement makes good business sense because it can:

- Reduce procurement, maintenance and disposal costs over a product lifecycle
- Derisk the supply chain and reduce exposure to price volatility
- Enhance corporate reputation for sustainability and innovation
- Help gain access to green financing and investment
- Build stronger relationships with interested parties, including investors, tenants, employees and customers
- Meet emerging standards and regulatory requirements for circularity
- Lead to new business opportunities, e.g. new products or services
- Deliver environmental and social benefits if correctly implemented.

1.4. Scope of the guideline

Table 1 highlights some of the procurement activities that occur at different stages of a building lifecycle and examples of other resources that may be helpful at each stage.

The scope of this guide is the fitout, operation and maintenance stages of the building lifecycle.

Table 1: Procurement activities across the building lifecycle

Lifecycle stage	Procurement activities	Organisations	Example resources
Design and construction	Design and construction contracts, materials and components	Owners, developers, architects, builders, suppliers	→ GBCA's A practical guide to circular procurement – for new buildings and major refurbishments
Leasing	Leasing contracts	Owners, property managers, leasing and tenant agents	→ BBP Green leasing resource pack
Fitout design, build and deconstruction	Project briefs, design and construction contracts, equipment, furniture, end-of-use/defit contracts, etc.	Tenants, architects, designers, builders, suppliers	→ This guideline → BBP Circular fitout toolkit for offices → GECA standards[3] → Global GreenTag
Operations	Waste and cleaning contracts, equipment, plant, furniture, consumables, food courts, security and concierge, etc.	Tenants, suppliers, contractors	→ This guideline → BBP Operational waste guidelines → NABERS Waste rating tool → GECA standards
Maintenance & repair	Maintenance contracts – building, furniture, lighting, IT, HVAC, security, capital upgrades, etc.	Tenants, suppliers, contractors	→ This guideline

1.5. Who is this guideline for?

Circular procurement involves people in many different organisations and diverse roles. It can be implemented at every stage of the asset lifecycle, from design and construction to operation, maintenance and decommissioning.

Table 2 lists some prominent roles in circular procurement and examples of the potential knowledge gaps identified by BBP members. Many other internal and external stakeholders may need to be involved, depending on the type of procurement. For example:

- Waste and recycling: facility managers, asset management teams, sustainability, resource management specialists, local councils
- Leasing: property managers, legal
- Fitout design and build: owners, leasing agents, tenants, design consultants
- Maintenance: facility managers, asset operations team

[3] For example standards for Cleaning Services, Furniture, Fittings, Foam & Mattresses, and Waste Collection Services.

Table 2: Examples of stakeholders and what they need to know

Knowledge needed	Senior Managers	Procurement teams	Contract Managers	ESG teams	Asset managers	Maintenance Contractors
How to integrate lifecycle costs into procurement decisions	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
How to evaluate and measure the benefits of circular practices	✓	✓		✓	✓	
How environmental, social and governance (ESG) requirements align with circularity	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
How GECA and other standards can guide circular procurement	✓	✓		✓		✓
What procurement strategies support circularity objectives	✓	✓	✓			✓
Examples of best practice & contract clauses	✓	✓	✓	✓		
How to plan for upgrades to ensure lifecycle efficiency	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Guidance on defit and dismantling approaches	✓	✓	✓			✓
How to develop a business case for increased circularity	✓			✓	✓	
How to align circular principles with business objectives	✓			✓	✓	
Guidance on standards, data collection and reporting	✓	✓			✓	
Information on what happens to materials downstream			✓		✓	✓
Case studies, including new and emerging opportunities	✓	✓				

1.6. Working towards best practice

Circular procurement is a continual improvement process guided by your organisational strategy and priorities. This guide presents a range of circularity strategies and actions to integrate into procurement. While these provide a helpful reference point for best practice, every organisation is at a different stage on its circularity journey.

Most organisations already implement good practices, such as in-house recycling and buying recycled products. This guide encourages you to think more holistically about how your organisation buys and uses products to achieve greater circularity.

2. Circularity strategies

Circular economy approaches shift the way assets and products are designed, manufactured, consumed, and discarded using demand-led and supply-led strategies:

Demand-led strategies aim to reduce the quantity of materials required by:

- Designing out waste: using resources efficiently and removing harmful chemicals to prevent waste from being generated throughout the lifecycle
- Slowing the loop: extending the lifespan of products and materials by championing product longevity, reuse or repairability (using materials more intensively or for longer)

Supply-led strategies aim to recover materials so they can be used again by:

- Closing the loop: keeping materials at their highest potential value through effective recycling systems
- Regenerating nature: building natural capital by responsibly sourcing and returning biobased resources safely to the environment, supporting regeneration and biodiversity.

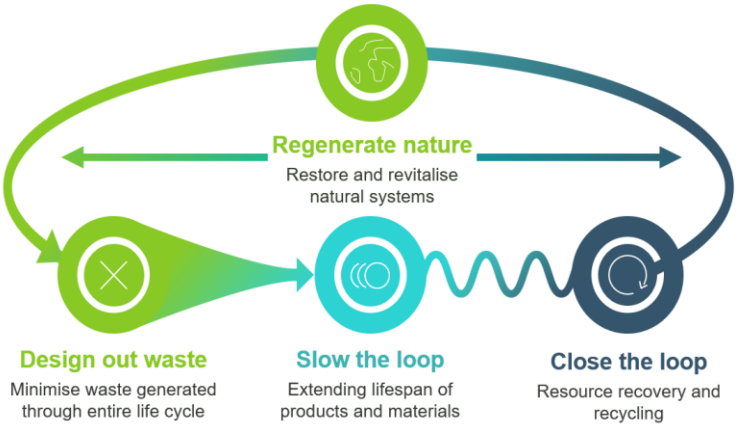

Figure 1: Principles of a circular economy[4]

2.1. Choosing strategies

This section highlights some of the key circularity strategies that design out waste, keep products in circulation for longer ('slowing the loop') or keep materials at their highest value through recycling or recovery. The aim is to focus wherever possible on strategies that avoid or reduce waste, for example through repair, reuse or refurbishment, before considering recyclability. This extends the conventional waste hierarchy into a more useful framework for the circular economy (Figure 2).

Table 3 describes the objectives, procurement considerations and potential outcomes of each strategy.

[4] Source: BBP Circular fitouts toolkit for offices.

Figure 2: The circular economy hierarchy

Table 3: Circularity strategies

Strategy	Objective	Procurement strategies	Target outcomes
R0 Refuse	Avoid unnecessary procurement of products and materials.	Challenge product necessity, abandon the function or deliver it in an alternative way.	Reduce costs, emissions, and waste by avoiding impacts over the entire product lifecycle.
R1 Rethink	Integrate lifecycle costs in decision-making, evaluate circularity benefits, and align with organisational ESG goals.	Look for opportunities to make product use more intensive, opt for service models (e.g. leasing), and ensure supplier engagement.	Reduce costs, emissions, and waste by promoting resource efficiency and product longevity.
R2 Reduce	Optimise material use by selecting lightweight or durable options and modular designs for extended performance.	Focus on durability for extended life and modularity to facilitate repair or dismantling.	Achieve lower resource use, lifecycle costs, and maintenance, reducing waste at end-of-use.
R3 Reuse	Promote the reuse of assets internally or via industry take-back schemes to extend product life and reduce waste.	Consider reuse of existing assets before buying new, look for refurbished or second-hand products, implement supplier take-back schemes.	Reduce procurement costs, support circularity, and divert usable products from landfill.

Strategy	Objective	Procurement strategies	Target outcomes
R4 Repair	Extend product lifecycles through maintenance and repair, minimising replacement needs and waste.	Specify repairability criteria, including warranties, and access local repair services. Evaluate costs over the entire lifecycle.	Extend product use, improve reliability, and reduce lifecycle costs.
R5 Refurbish	Restore end-of-use products to meet functionality and aesthetic requirements. Design for modularity and upgradeability as part of lifecycle planning.	Partner with suppliers or establish in-house refurbishment programs.	Reduce demand for new resources, minimise costs, extend product lifespans.
R6 Remanufacture	Recover materials and components to produce high-performing products comparable to new ones.	Promote closed-loop systems and prioritise products designed for remanufacturing.	Reduce demand for virgin materials and production costs, enhancing circularity.
R7 Repurpose	Identify alternative uses for materials, improving resource efficiency and lifecycle value.	Find new applications for surplus items (e.g. donating office furniture).	Lower disposal costs, redirect waste and enhance resource utility.
R8 Recycle	Ensure materials can be recycled at their highest value at end-of-use to minimise waste and support circularity.	Prioritise recycled content. Align product procurement with available recycling services. Work with certified recyclers to close material loops. Use the NABERS waste tool to measure performance.	Foster value creation, reduce landfill reliance and strengthen recycling systems.
R9 Recover energy	Recover non-recyclable waste through energy recovery methods aligned with environmental standards.	Divert waste to certified energy recovery facilities.	Reduce landfill dependency, generate energy, and support circular goals.

2.2. Measuring success

Success can be measured by quantifying strategies' impact on material circularity and their contribution to the organisation's other economic, environmental, and social goals. Table 4 shows examples. The selection of metrics be weighted according to the hierarchy shown in Figure 2 to prioritise actions that reduce consumption or extend product life. This is consistent with the approaches taken by ISO 59020, the Material Circularity Index (MCI) and the Circular Transition Indicators (CTI).

The criteria in ecolabel standards, such as those developed by Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA), Global GreenTag, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and other product certification schemes can be used to inform tenders and project briefs. Many of these standards specify circularity strategies such as recycled content, durability, reuse and recycling.

Suppliers should be encouraged to seek third-party verification against a lifecycle ecolabel or similar standard to support any circularity claim. Look for certification schemes recognised by the GBCA Responsible Products Program. Self-declared claims should not be accepted as they are not verified.

Table 4: Measuring success

Metric	Example Metrics
Cost savings	Total cost reductions achieved through product longevity, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and service-based models.
Waste reduction	Decrease in waste sent to landfill through reuse, refurbishment, repurposing, recycling or energy recovery.
Material efficiency	Reduction in material usage, procured goods and virgin materials. Percentage of recycled content in products or materials. Consider using ISO-compliant circularity metrics (see Section 3.6).
Lifecycle efficiency	Decrease in lifecycle costs, including repair, maintenance, and replacement expenses.
Circular procurement	Percentage of products reused, refurbished, remanufactured, or recycled under contracts.
Supplier engagement	Number of supplier agreements or percentage of spend incorporating take-back schemes, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, or recycling provisions.
Product durability	Percentage of products with extended warranties, modular design, repairability criteria, or durability certifications.
Recovered value	Volume of recovered/reused materials and energy from materials recovered through recycling or energy recovery processes, waste diversion rates.
Traceability	Percentage of third-party certified products. Percentage of products with a digital passport.

2.3. Alignment with ESG objectives

The business case for increased circularity should consider the contribution to an organisation's environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives:

Resource efficiency and waste reduction

- Implement strategies like reuse, repair, refurbishment, and remanufacturing to minimise resource extraction and waste and support ecosystem resilience.
- Adopt circular practices that extend product lifecycles to reduce dependence on virgin materials.

Supply chain transparency and accountability

- Integrate clear standards such as ESG reporting frameworks and your organisation's circularity targets into responsible procurement processes to ensure transparency.
- Foster supplier partnerships for take-back schemes, repair services, and material recovery systems to align with regulatory and ESG goals.
- Ensure supply chain transparency in recycling services to guarantee recovery outcomes, traceability, and accountability, fostering trust and informed decision-making in alignment with ESG goals.

Carbon reduction and climate goals

- Align procurement strategies with your organisation's net zero and biodiversity targets by prioritising durable designs, low-impact materials and end-of-use recovery solutions.
- Look for opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, e.g., through service models (e.g. leasing) or buying recycled or second-hand products.

Local job creation and social impact

- Support local industries by engaging reuse (second-hand), repair, refurbishment or remanufacturing services that create skilled jobs and strengthen community resilience.
- Embed social impact objectives into procurement by collaborating with suppliers to develop circular economy skills and initiatives.

Lifecycle planning and circular integration

- Embed circularity into procurement by designing for modularity, upgradeability, and repairability, ensuring products meet durability and end-of-use recovery requirements.
- Evaluate lifecycle costs and benefits of circular procurement strategies to demonstrate alignment with both financial and environmental objectives.

Compliance with standards and regulatory frameworks

- Ensure procurement aligns with recognised environmental standards such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and certification schemes.
- Collect data on circularity outcomes to ensure you meet reporting requirements for waste management and carbon accounting.
- Establish closed-loop systems through supplier agreements to support compliance and enhance ESG performance.

Collaboration, innovation and leadership

- Strengthen partnerships with suppliers and third parties to co-develop innovative solutions for resource recovery, repurposing and recycling.
- Encourage cross-sector collaboration to leverage new technologies and approaches for circular procurement.

Case study: Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL) *Sustainable procurement guide*

JLL has attained a 6-star Green Star Interiors certification. As part of this rating, a comprehensive guide was developed to assist the workplace team in procuring environmentally preferred products throughout the operational phase. This guideline also ensures that circularity principles are applied across all JLL fitouts, with a focus on new products that minimise environmental impact, reduce toxins, and decrease waste.

The guide encourages staff to ask critical questions, such as:

- *Is purchasing necessary*? Could existing products be reused or refurbished? Is hiring an option?
- *What are the lifecycle impacts*? Assess environmental and social risks, longevity, recyclability, and associated costs.
- *What selection criteria apply?* Define sustainability requirements for the product.
- *What are the alternatives?* Explore second-hand, refurbished, or eco-labelled options.

The guide also outlines considerations for categories such as energy, equipment, furniture and fixtures, cleaning, and office supplies.

How the guide was developed

JLL's sustainability consulting team was commissioned to develop the guide, incorporating feedback from various internal departments. This collaborative effort included input from the workplace team, Corporate Real Estate, and design team to ensure alignment with both operational and design policies.

There were several challenges that needed to be addressed to ensure success:

- To create a guide that was both relevant to the business and adaptable to current processes.
- To ensure the guide was easy to understand and implement while remaining within budgetary constraints.
- To advocate for and educate the operations team, ensuring they fully understood the guide's intent.

Impact of the guide

The guide serves as a valuable resource for the operations team's ongoing procurement efforts. It promotes waste reduction through the use of stewardship programs and products with demonstrated environmental benefits, based on life cycle analysis (LCA). The guide emphasizes the 4Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover) while prioritising occupant health by recommending low-VOC products.

It also provides a framework for retrofitting, ensuring sustainable practices are consistently applied.

Lessons learned

- Engagement of various teams, including workplace, design, and procurement, is crucial to obtain comprehensive feedback in the guide’s development.
- Simplifying the guide for the operations team enhances their ability to follow it effectively.

3. Implementing circular procurement

This section outlines seven steps that you can take to integrate circularity principles in your procurement processes:

1. Establish the case for change
2. Engage with stakeholders
3. Optimise solutions
4. Collaborate with your value chain
5. Manage the procurement process
6. Measure and assess circularity
7. Manage trade-offs

A checklist is provided in the Appendix for quick reference.

3.1. Establish the case for change

There are many definitions of a circular economy. Decide what a circular economy means for your organisation, why it is important, and what the objectives are for you and your value chain. A materiality assessment can help your business identify the priorities for internal and external stakeholders, informing your use of data and metrics.

Actions to take

- → Develop a circular economy strategy that will guide your organisation's transition to circularity by:
  - → Identifying your goals for circularity
  - → Evaluating the current level of circularity within your business and value chain
  - → Understanding any regulatory changes that could impact your business[5]
  - → Identifying gaps and opportunities
  - → Linking to other organisational goals and targets, e.g. climate change, waste reduction, local economic development, supply risk management etc.
  - → Determining the actions needed to achieve your business objectives
- → Highlight your organisation's goals and commitments in a public-facing circularity policy
- → Define the objectives of your circular procurement strategy for you and your value chain
- → Include your circularity goals, targets and strategies in a procurement policy, procedure and/or guidance document
- → Build the business case for individual projects by:
  - → Showing how lifecycle costs will be lower when maintenance, replacement and disposal costs are included in the calculation
  - → Demonstrating how the initiative will help achieve other ESG goals and requirements.

[5] For example the recommendation by the Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group to include circular economy and design for end of life in the National Construction Code.

Questions to ask

- How circular is your current business model?
- How can you recover, retain or add value using resources more efficiently?
- What is the economic rationale for circularity for your organisation?
- Which of the strategies in section 2 will help to achieve your business objectives?

Further information

- ISO 59010: 2024 Circular economy – guidance on the transition of business models and value networks (Section 4)
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), Business case for circular buildings.

Case study: GPT Circularity Policy aligns to business value

GPT's *Materials and resource circularity policy* (2024) states their commitment to 'procure, use and recover materials in a closed-loop, circular manner'. The policy links circularity to the organisation's core principles and goals:

> *'The GPT Group aims to be an overall positive contributor to environmental sustainability and will act in all areas within our control whilst providing leadership and supporting stakeholders where we have influence. We will deliver our resource circularity commitments in a manner that achieves co-benefits with other environmental and social sustainability policies and aligns with GPT's Human Rights & Modern Slavery Statements.*
>
> *Circularity is regarded as a strategy that 'creates value for investors and stakeholders and aligns with our purpose of Experience First—We create experiences that drive positive impact for people, place, and planet.'*
>
> *[emphasis added]*

Read the policy here.

3.2. Engage with stakeholders

Implementing a circular procurement policy requires collaboration with multiple internal stakeholders to ensure that circularity is achieved in practice, for example:

- That a product designed for reuse or refurbishment is not sent to landfill after it reaches the end of its first use.
- That a product or material designed for recycling is delivered to a recycler at the end of its useful life.

Procurement is not just a function of finance or operations. Sustainability teams, HR managers, and leadership must be actively involved to ensure alignment with ESG commitments.

Circular models also impact your organisation's value network upstream and downstream, so collaboration with external stakeholders is vital to ensure that benefits lead to long-term, systemic change (see Section 3.4).

Actions to take

- Identify the key internal stakeholders that will need to be engaged to ensure success.
- Educate and engage internal stakeholders to ensure buy-in and capacity to implement circularity in the procurement process and during use.
- Build circularity goals and targets into roles and performance management.
- Consider educating and incentivising procurement teams to prioritise the specification of products and services that have rigorous third-party verification of their sustainability claims.
- Use shared tools and systems, such as digital platforms and physical infrastructure, to improve collaboration and track resources effectively (e.g. Digital Product Passports (DPP), material banks, repair or refurbishment hubs, logistics networks).
- Engage stakeholders early and regularly. Understand their needs - you may wish to conduct a needs analysis.
- Establish governance mechanisms to define roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives across internal and external stakeholders.
- Implement systems to measure and track stakeholder collaboration and its contribution to circularity goals.

Questions to ask

- Which functions need to be involved in implementation, for example to plan for future maintenance and refurbishment?
- What skills does my team need?
- Do team members have accountability to deliver circularity?
- Do your team have processes to help them consider alternatives to business as usual?

Further information

- ISO 59010: 2024 *Circular economy – guidance on the transition of business models and value networks (Section 4).*

Case study: FTD Circular fitout material bank

FTD Circular partnered with Project One Group to explore how creating a detailed digital register of all materials, fixtures, and furniture in a fitout can enhance sustainability in commercial construction. The platform enables each item to have a 'product passport' with environmental and technical data attached, supporting traceability, quality, maintenance, and increased reuse or recycling value.

Read the case study here.

3.3. Optimise solutions

Finding the optimal solution requires a holistic approach considering a product or service's entire lifecycle. Organisations can foster innovation and allow suppliers greater flexibility to propose circular solutions by focusing on functional outcomes rather than prescriptive technical specifications.

This process involves rethinking needs, evaluating whole-life costs, and integrating circular principles such as resource efficiency, modularity, and reverse logistics.

Engaging suppliers and value chain partners early encourages a collaborative approach to develop solutions that maximise value while minimising environmental and economic impacts. Economic benefits can be direct, for example, direct cost savings, or indirect, such as reduced exposure to supply restrictions, price volatility or regulatory costs.

Actions to take

- Analyse the product or service system to identify opportunities for circular improvements such as resource efficiency or reduced emissions. Focus on the function being delivered and how this could be achieved in alternative ways with lower impact.
- Ensure products are designed for easy maintenance, repair, or upgrades to extend their life span and reduce lifecycle costs.
- Establish processes for recovering materials, components, or products at the end of their life for reuse, remanufacturing, or recycling.
- Map and evaluate material and energy flows across the product lifecycle to identify inefficiencies and opportunities for circularity.
- Work closely with suppliers and partners to co-develop circular solutions, such as shared-use models or alternative materials.
- Incorporate measurable indicators such as recyclability, durability, and carbon footprint reduction into your solution evaluation criteria. Specific circularity metrics exist to enable direct comparison between different circular systems (see ISO 59020, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's MCI, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's [WBCSD] CTI).

Questions to ask

- How can resource flows be reduced, reused, or closed in the product lifecycle?
- Are there opportunities to include shared-use models or lease-based contracts in the solution?
- How do the proposed innovations align with broader organisational circularity goals?
- What potential risks or trade-offs need to be managed when optimising for circularity?

3.4. Collaborate with your value chain

Collaboration within the value chain is essential to embed circular principles into procurement processes, particularly in the built environment where long project lifecycles and complex supply chains create opportunities for innovation and partnership. Shifting from traditional transactional relationships to collaborative long-term engagements allows organisations to harness the expertise of suppliers and other value chain partners.

Circular procurement prioritises economic outcomes and evaluates environmental and social impacts, enabling sustainable solutions that align with organisational and project goals. Designing procurement processes to foster dialogue, innovation, and transparency ensures that circularity objectives are met at every stage.

Actions to take

- Identify the key external stakeholders that will need to be engaged to ensure success.
- Move beyond conventional buyer-supplier relationships by establishing long-term partnerships that promote mutual accountability for circular outcomes.
- Develop tenders that explicitly include circularity principles such as resource efficiency, waste minimisation and lifecycle performance.
- Design a two-stage tender process: a selection phase to identify suppliers with circular expertise and an award phase to evaluate detailed proposals, ensuring the best alignment with circular goals.
- Include workshops or interviews in the procurement process to enable direct dialogue with suppliers and jointly explore circular solutions.
- Incorporate criteria such as resource recoverability, modularity, carbon footprint, or the supplier's ability to offer take-back schemes. Ensure these criteria are measurable, comparable between different models, and aligned with organisational objectives.
- Create incentives for suppliers to propose innovative solutions such as using more sustainable materials, offering shared ownership models, or implementing reverse logistics.
- Focus on whole-life cost analysis, including construction, use, maintenance, and end-of-use recovery, rather than the lowest upfront cost.
- Encourage current suppliers to achieve independent certification of their sustainability claims.

Questions to ask

- How can we foster long-term supplier relationships to ensure accountability for circular outcomes?
- Are the tender specifications designed to encourage innovation and collaboration?
- What circularity metrics can we include to evaluate supply proposals objectively?
- How do supplier proposals address the lifecycle performance of materials, components or systems?
- Can we integrate digital tools like material passports to track resource flows and performance?
- Are we leveraging the value chain effectively to share risk, resources, and knowledge?

Case study: UTS procurement process to reduce strip-out waste

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) introduced a procurement process for strip-out services to enhance collaboration with waste contractors and share accountability for environmental outcomes.

This followed a successful pilot on an office and classroom renovation that highlighted the need to include clauses in tender documents and contracts requiring contractors to use and comply with the BBP guidelines for the management of strip-out waste. The pilot put the onus back onto the contractor to take responsibility for all waste management, to separate all key waste materials, and to meet a waste diversion target of 60%. Prior to strip-out UTS staff developed an inventory of all loose furniture and arranged for internal reuse, donation and recycling.

The UTS pilot resulted in longer-term changes to procurement:

Furniture reuse

Surplus furniture and other goods are now logged into an online inventory called Warp It. This enables project managers to look for an existing item before requesting new.

The system allows greater visibility of available furniture and can be accessed remotely rather than project managers and architects having to visit the furniture storage space to pick out items. It quantifies saved budget and carbon emissions which is useful for reporting.

Furniture designs are also being standardised to facilitate reuse, for example by purchasing only black task chairs that can be used in any part of UTS.

Waste contracts

Procurement documentation now includes recycling requirements. Sustainability has been included as a tender weighting and contractors are assessed against sustainability criteria including their waste management practices.

UTS project managers work closely with contractors and monitor waste generation, separation, recycling and disposal. They receive monthly receipts from the skip bin provider and over 90% recycling of defit/fitout waste is consistently being achieved.

One of the challenges is ensuring that the basement skip bins are reserved for defit/fitout waste as other waste (e.g. ICT, lab equipment, non-recyclables) is occasionally dumped in there. Contractors, project managers and central services staff now monitor the bins more closely and communications to staff advise where items should be correctly recycled or disposed of.

More information

For more information on opportunities to reduce strip-out waste, see BBP's Circular fitout tool for offices. This offers practical, concise guidance to equip fitout project teams with circular economy strategies and approaches that can be integrated into their design to reduce waste at the defit stage.

3.5. Manage the procurement process

Effectively managing the procurement process is critical to embedding circular economy principles and broader sustainability considerations into organisational practices. This involves designing a procurement framework that ensures transparency, accountability, and alignment with circular objectives in the built environment.

A well-managed process ensures that all stakeholders, from internal teams to suppliers, are equipped with the tools and knowledge needed to deliver outcomes that minimise waste, maximise resource efficiency, and enhance lifecycle performance. Incorporating circularity at every procurement stage becomes a strategic tool for achieving long-term sustainability goals.

Actions to take

- Establish clear goals for integrating circular principles into the procurement process, including reducing waste, enhancing resource recovery, and maximising product lifecycles.
- Ensure all procurement policies, procedures, and team roles are aligned with circular economy objectives. Include training to build capacity within procurement teams.
- Understand your time, cost and quality constraints. Have a clear project plan with objectives and outcomes.
- Write functional and performance-based specifications encouraging suppliers to propose innovative solutions rather than prescribing specific products or methods.
- Evaluate tenders using lifecycle performance criteria, including environmental, economic, and social impacts across a product or system's entire lifecycle.
- Leverage digital platforms, material passports, and building information modelling to track and evaluate resource use, waste, and compliance with circularity metrics.
- Implement clear and consistent evaluation frameworks to ensure fair competition while prioritising suppliers demonstrating commitment to circular practices.
- Establish a feedback loop to assess supplier performance and procurement outcomes against circularity objectives. Use this data to improve future procurement processes.

Questions to ask

- How do the procurement objectives align with our organisation's circular economy strategy and goals?
- Are lifecycle performance metrics integrated into the evaluation process?
- Are procurement staff equipped with the skills and tools to evaluate circular solutions?
- Are suppliers provided with clear guidance on how to meet circularity requirements?
- How is transparency maintained throughout the procurement process?
- What mechanisms are in place to monitor supplier compliance with circular objectives after contract award?
- How can digital tools enhance procurement monitoring and evaluation?

Further information

- ISO 20400: 2017 *Sustainable Procurement—Guidance*
- ISO 59010: 2024 Circular economy – guidance on the transition of business models and value networks (Section 4)
- Circular procurement in 8 steps (The Netherlands)

3.6. Measure and assess circularity

Measuring and assessing circularity is critical for demonstrating the value of circular practices, driving continuous improvement, and ensuring alignment with business and stakeholder priorities. Robust metrics and comprehensive data collection ensure accountability and foster transparency.

Suppliers, procurement teams, and asset owners all play vital roles in creating a circular ecosystem by providing, asking for, and maintaining the correct information. Clear performance indicators, supported by effective reporting systems, enable organisations to link circular economy efforts to broader strategic goals and build a compelling business case for adoption.

Actions to take

- Select performance metrics aligned with stakeholder goals and circular economy strategies, ensuring assessments prioritise key issues for the organisation.
- Require suppliers to provide numerical data on circular offerings, including repair and recovery options, to facilitate product comparisons. Circular procurement relies on trustworthy, verified data.
- Equip procurement teams with tools to evaluate supplier practices and offerings against circular objectives.
- Maintain lifecycle data to inform procurement decisions and strategies.
- Baseline current performance using initial assessments to set measurable circularity targets.
- Leverage digital tools like material passports, Building Information Management (BIM), or asset management systems to capture real-time resource use and waste data.
- Enhance credibility by linking efforts to standards like GBCA's Green Star, ISO 14001, ISO 59020, the Material Circularity Indicator or product specific ISO 14024-compliant ecolabel standards such as GECA's.
- Use standard frameworks to communicate results, emphasising environmental, social and economic outcomes.
- Regularly review assessments to refine procurement and lifecycle strategies.

Questions to ask

- Have the selected KPIs been linked to our business strategy, stakeholder priorities, and materiality assessment results?
- Do suppliers provide detailed, quantified information on their circularity offerings (e.g. repair, maintenance and disassembly options)?
- Are procurement teams equipped to evaluate supplier claims and ask the right questions about circularity?
- How effectively does the asset register track lifecycle details such as durability and recovery pathways?
- Are products in the fitout visually tagged as being repairable, returnable, etc. for easy identification?
- How can digital tools improve data accessibility and reporting efficiency?
- Are circular outcomes being reported in a way that clearly demonstrates value to stakeholders?
- What opportunities exist to use the data to refine procurement practices or inform strategic decision-making?

Further information

→ ISO 59020: 2024 Circular economy – Measuring and assessing circularity performance

Case study: Australian Government Metrics for Circular Procurement

The Australian Government's Environmentally Sustainable Procurement (ESP) Policy applies to construction services, furniture and fittings, information and communications technology (ICT) and textiles.

A reporting framework supports the Policy. In addition to quantitative metrics for circularity, suppliers are required to report qualitatively on at least one innovation. Examples provided include:

- Innovative design e.g. minimisation of materials by designing out waste, or using less materials; or designing for improved durability, modularity or disassembly
- Innovative products e.g. products that have been refurbished
- Innovative materials e.g. more sustainable materials or innovative ways to reuse materials as part of the project
- Innovative processes or technology that will add value to the project.

Read the reporting framework for construction services here.

3.7. Manage trade-offs

Procurement decisions often must balance opposing requirements and alternative solutions. Circular procurement may need to consider and manage trade-offs between, for example:

- Alternative environmental impacts, such as carbon emissions from reuse or recycling processes compared to disposal to landfill or energy recovery
- Improved circularity and other procurement goals such as cost, functionality and social benefit.

Where applicable, the holistic nature of a lifecycle ecolabel (ISO 14024) certification, which includes environmental, human health, quality and social impacts, is a simple way for procurement teams to avoid burden shifting.

Actions to take

- Understand your organisation's goals and priorities for circularity and how they align to other business objectives (see Section 3.1).
- Take a holistic view by considering environmental, social and financial impacts over the product lifecycle.
- Compare the total lifecycle costs of alternatives by including maintenance and disposal costs.
- Consider financial incentives to manage potential impacts on cost (see Bendigo City Council case study).
- Establish a multi-criteria assessment process to evaluate financial and non-financial benefits for alternative options.

Questions to ask

- What are the ultimate goals of circularity within our organisation?
- How can we prioritise and incentivise strategies that support our ESG or financial goals?

Case study: Managing financial trade-offs at Bendigo City Council

Bendigo City Council's Circular Economy and Zero Waste Policy includes advice on managing financial trade-offs. It notes that the cost of procuring and using various reused or recycled content materials and products typically used by councils is often at the same price point as standard, less sustainable alternatives.

For those areas where this is not the case (potentially due to the newness of a more sustainable product or material), the policy incentivises more 'circular solutions' vs. 'standard solutions' by allowing for up to a 10% cost premium for recycled content/reused materials compared to the cost of materials in a standard solution.

Read the policy here.

4. Embedding circularity in procurement

The following actions will help to embed circularity at different stages of the procurement process.

Procurement stage	Actions to deliver circularity outcomes
Developing your circular economy strategy	Set clear circular economy criteria and metrics → Choose appropriate organisational performance indicators and metrics informed by business and stakeholder priorities. → Avoid using outdated metrics (such as recycling rates or recycled content) that can prioritise and lock in old solutions and lockout alternatives such as reuse. → Consider circularity indicators (e.g. ISO 59020, MCI, CTI) to compare alternative circular solutions and report on overall performance. Build internal capacity and accountability → Educate and engage internal stakeholders to ensure buy-in and capacity to implement circularity in procurement and during use. → Build circularity goals and targets into roles and performance management. Look for government support → Consider what government rebate schemes are available and how they can be utilised to help build the business case and enhance circular initiatives.
Project planning – feasibility and project brief	Reward circular innovation → Choose appropriate objectives and targets for the project that support your corporate strategy. → Determine how circularity will be balanced against cost. → Explore alternative revenue models, such as leasing, renting, or buy-back schemes, etc. → Foster collaboration across the value chain by offering financial incentives and engaging suppliers early to understand and enhance their capabilities. Use performance-based specifications → Focus on functional requirements instead of technical details to inspire creative solutions and avoid locking in outdated or sub-optimal business models. → Broaden specifications to include services and extend contracts based on circularity achievements, referencing established standards and labels. Build a convincing business case → Compare lifecycle costs and benefits of alternative strategies and demonstrate how the project will help achieve other ESG goals and requirements.

Procurement stage	Actions to deliver circularity outcomes
Tendering process	Engage and collaborate with suppliers → Design tenders to promote innovation and draft contracts that emphasise continuous improvement and collaboration. → Require suppliers to provide numerical data on circular offerings.
Tender evaluation	Consider whole-of-life costs → Take a longer-term view by considering whole-of-life costs and impacts in addition to upfront costs. → Include reduced costs, risks and impacts, including on brand image and competitiveness. Look for trustworthy, verifiable data → Ensure robust data from suppliers aligns with your metrics and that supplier claims are verified.
Project implementation	Continue to engage stakeholders → Engage with suppliers to monitor progress and be ready to modify or adapt the project as needed. → Continue to engage with internal stakeholders to ensure that the planned circularity strategies are implemented successfully, e.g. repair, refurbishment, recycling at end of life. → Collect data on performance to support project evaluation and reporting.
Project evaluation	Aim for continuous improvement → Assess supplier performance and procurement outcomes against the project's circularity objectives. → Use this data to improve future procurement processes.

5. Useful resources

Topic	Resource	Value for circular procurement
Introduction to circular economy	ISO 59004 Circular economy – vocabulary, principles and guidance for implementation	Provides globally aligned definitions and key terms.
	Ellen Macarthur Foundation (EMF)	Overview of circular economy and supporting resources.
	EMF Completing the picture: How the circular economy tackles climate change (EMF)	Describes how the circular economy supports climate change objectives, including 45% of global emission reductions.
	thinkstep-anz Circular economy need to know	A basic introduction to the circular economy.
	Australian Government Circular economy framework	Defines a circular economy for Australia and outlines its benefits.
	Circular Economy Ministerial Advisory Group Final report	Recommends actions for Australia's transition to a more circular economy.
	Australian Circular Economy (ACE) Hub	An online portal to support collaboration and knowledge-sharing on circular economy policy, strategies and case studies.
Circular procurement processes	Circular procurement in 8 steps (The Netherlands)	Guide to circular procurement.
	ISO 59010 Guidance on the transition of business models and value networks	Guide to business processes for circularity, including business strategy, stakeholder engagement, measuring progress, etc.
	Environmentally sustainable procurement reporting framework (Australian Government)	Outlines metrics that suppliers of construction services will be required or encouraged to report for circularity.
	ISO 20400 Sustainable procurement - Guidance	Provides guidance to organisations on integrating sustainability within procurement.

Topic	Resource	Value for circular procurement
Circular strategies in buildings	BBP circular fitout guide	Practical guidance for design teams, office owners and occupiers at the earliest stages of the fit-out process.
	BBP Green leasing resource pack	Practical guidance and tools to equip teams with improved ability to implement green leases at every stage of the process.
	BBP Operational waste guidelines	Includes tools to create, procure and implement effective waste management programs.
	GBCA Green Star Performance responsible procurement credit	Can be awarded if the procurement process for design and construction follows ISO 20400 (Sustainable procurement).
	GBCA Green Star fitouts responsible procurement credit	Can be awarded if the project has a Responsible Procurement Plan following ISO 20400 (Sustainable procurement).
	GBCA A practical guide to circular procurement	Guide to circular procurement for building construction, including strategies and sample clauses.
	NABERS Waste tool	Measures how well a building manages waste generation, recycling and resource recovery, and supply chain management.
	NABERS Material Recovery Score	A supplementary score to the NABERS Waste rating tool to indicate the quality of recycling.
	NABERS policy toolkit	Provides information on using NABERS ratings to inform procurement of commercial buildings (buy or lease).
	ARUP circular buildings toolkit	Translates circular economy principles into strategies and actions relevant for real estate projects.
	WBCSD Business case for circular buildings	Articulates the business case including economic value alongside a broader value case, including environmental and social factors.

Topic	Resource	Value for circular procurement
Circularity metrics	ISO 59020 Measuring and assessing circularity performance	A globally recognised, structured approach for organisations to measure and assess their circularity performance.
	EMF Material circularity indicator (MCI)	ISO 59020 compliant metric to report across different circularity strategies to enable comparisons.
	thinkstep-anz MCI calculator	A free tool that can be used to estimate the circularity of a product and consider alternatives in product design.
	WBCSD Circular transition indicators (CTI)	Identical to the MCI methodology but allows for less comparability because it includes two metrics rather than one.
Product standards & verification	GBCA Responsible product guidelines	Provides criteria for all product certification schemes to be recognised by Green Star. Includes criteria for circularity.
	Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA)	An ecolabelling scheme with standards for 27 different product and service categories; many relevant to the built environment.
	Global GreenTag	Certify products against a range of sustainability and health standards.
	National framework for recycled content traceability	Aims to improve trust in recycled materials by guiding businesses to collect and share information about recycled materials.
	ACCC Making environmental claims: A guide for business	Explains the obligations under the Australian Consumer Law which businesses must comply with when making environmental and sustainability claims.

6. Abbreviations and glossary

Term	Definition
BBP	The Better Buildings Partnership
Biobased resources	Derived from biomass, i.e. material of biological origin, excluding material embedded in geological formations or transformed to fossilized material. Includes trees, crops, grasses, tree litter, algae, animals and biological waste (e.g. manure).
Carbon emissions	Greenhouse gas emissions including carbon dioxide and methane, often abbreviated as 'carbon'.
Certification (of a claim)	Formal recognition that an environmental or sustainability claim has been independently verified.
Circular economy	A systemic approach that maintains a circular flow of resources by recovering, retaining or adding to their value while contributing to sustainable development.
Circularity	Degree of alignment with the principles for a circular economy.
Circularity principles	Principles that underpin a circular economy, e.g.: → Design out waste and pollution → Keep products and materials at their highest potential value → Regenerate nature[6]
Circular products	Products that demonstrate improved circularity compared to alternatives, e.g., by using more recycled and recyclable materials, and/or being designed for durability and upgradeability.
Critical resources	Limited resources that are critical to the survival of an organisation or system.
Defit	The process of removing all the installations, fixtures, and fittings from a commercial fitout, i.e., returning it to its original, pre-lease condition.
Digital Product Passport (DPP)	Combines digital and physical tracking systems to provide data on a product including its origin, composition, and environmental attributes.
Ecolabel	A form of product labelling that makes a claim about the environmental performance of a product or service.
EMF	Ellen Macarthur Foundation
End-of-use	Point in time when a resource is taken out of use and is either recovered for another use (e.g. refurbished, remanufactured, recycled) or disposed of.
GBCA	Green Building Council of Australia
GECA	Good Environmental Choice Australia
Green Star	Voluntary rating tools from the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) used to certify sustainability performance throughout planning, design, construction and operation of buildings, fitouts and communities.

[6] Ellen Macarthur Foundation, What is a circular economy?

Term	Definition
Fitout	The interior of the building - furniture, signs, decorations or other aspects that are needed for an organisation.
ISO	International Standards Organization
Lifecycle	Consecutive and interlinked stages in the life of a product or service.
Lifecycle ecolabel	A lifecycle ecolabel follows internationally recognised ISO 14024 principles as a benchmark. These schemes award a mark or logo to products or services that certify against a science-based standard specific to their category, such as furniture or cleaning services.
Material bank	An online marketplace for construction materials recovered from an existing building that has been decommissioned.
Materiality assessment	Process to identify and prioritise environmental, social and economic issues that matter most to stakeholders.
Modularity	A design principle that involves breaking down a product into smaller, independent, and interchangeable parts called modules.
Natural capital	The world's stock of natural resources.
NABERS	National Australian Built Environment Rating System, a rating system that measures the environmental performance of buildings and tenancies.
Net zero	Process of achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere.
Recycling	Activities to obtain recovered resources for use in a process or a product, excluding energy recovery.
Refurbishing	Process by which an item, during its expected service life, is restored to a useful condition for the same purpose and with at least similar quality and performance characteristics.
Remanufacturing	Industrial process by which an item is returned to a like-new condition from both a quality and performance perspective.
Regeneration	Activity that improves or restores degraded ecosystems.
Repurposing	Process by which a product or its component parts are adapted for use in a different function than it was originally intended for without making major modifications to its physical or chemical structure.
Third party verification	Review of an environmental or sustainability claim by a person or body that is recognised as being independent of the parties involved to confirm its accuracy.
Value chain	Set of organisations that provide a solution that results in value.
Value network	Network of interlinked value chains.
Virgin material	Resource that is used for the first time as input in a process or for creating a solution.
WBCSD	World Building Council for Sustainable Development

Appendix: Circular procurement checklist

Objective	Action
Establish the case for change (Section 3.1)	☐ Define the objectives of your circular procurement strategy for you and your value chain.
	☐ Develop a circular economy strategy that will guide your organisation's transition to circularity.
	☐ Include your circularity goals and strategies in a procurement policy, procedure and/or guidance document.
	☐ Build the business case for individual projects.
Engage with stakeholders (Section 3.2)	☐ Educate and engage internal stakeholders to ensure buy-in and capacity to implement circularity.
	☐ Build circularity goals and targets into roles and performance management.
	☐ Use shared tools and systems to improve collaboration and track resources effectively.
	☐ Engage stakeholders early and regularly.
	☐ Establish governance mechanisms to define roles and responsibilities across internal and external stakeholders.
	☐ Implement systems to measure and track stakeholder collaboration and its contribution to circularity goals.
Optimise solutions (Section 3.3)	☐ Analyse the product or service system to identify opportunities for circular improvements.
	☐ Ensure products are designed for easy maintenance, repair etc. to extend their life and reduce lifecycle costs.
	☐ Establish processes for recovering materials, components, or products at the end of their life.
	☐ Map and evaluate material and energy flows across the product lifecycle to identify opportunities for circularity.
	☐ Work closely with suppliers and partners to co-develop circular solution.
	☐ Incorporate measurable indicators such as recyclability, durability, etc. into your solution evaluation criteria.
Collaborate with your value chain	☐ Move beyond conventional buyer-supplier relationships by establishing long-term partnerships.
	☐ Develop tenders that explicitly include circularity principles.

Objective	Action
Collaborate with your value chain (cont) (Section 3.4)	☐ Design a two-stage tender process: a selection phase and an award phase to evaluate detailed proposals.
	☐ Include workshops or interviews in the procurement process to enable direct dialogue with suppliers.
	☐ Incorporate criteria such as resource recoverability, modularity, or the supplier's ability to offer take-back.
	☐ Create incentives for suppliers to propose innovative solutions.
	☐ Focus on whole-life cost analysis.
Manage the procurement process (Section 3.5)	☐ Establish clear goals for integrating circular principles into the procurement process.
	☐ Ensure all procurement policies, procedures, and team roles are aligned with circular economy objectives.
	☐ Understand your time, cost and quality constraints. Have a clear project plan with objectives and outcomes.
	☐ Write functional and performance-based specifications.
	☐ Evaluate tenders using environmental, economic, and social impacts across the entire lifecycle.
	☐ Leverage digital platforms, material passports, etc. to track and evaluate resource use and waste.
	☐ Implement evaluation frameworks to ensure fair competition while prioritising circular practices.
	☐ Establish a feedback loop to assess supplier performance and procurement outcomes against circularity objectives.
Measure and assess circularity (Section 3.6)	☐ Select performance metrics aligned with stakeholder goals and circular economy strategies.
	☐ Require suppliers to provide trustworthy, verified data on circular offerings to facilitate product comparisons.
	☐ Prioritise third-party certifications to ensure procurement teams select genuinely sustainable products where possible.
	☐ Maintain lifecycle data to inform procurement decisions and strategies.
	☐ Baseline current performance using initial assessments to set measurable circularity targets.
	☐ Enhance credibility by linking efforts to standards like GBCA's Green Star, ISO 14001, or ISO 59020.

Objective	Action
Measure and assess circularity (cont)	☐ Use standard frameworks to communicate results, emphasising ESG outcomes.
	☐ Regularly review assessments to refine procurement and lifecycle strategies.
Manage trade-offs (Section 3.7)	☐ Understand your organisation's goals and priorities for circularity and how they align to other business objectives.
	☐ Take a holistic view by considering environmental, social and financial impacts over the product lifecycle.
	☐ Compare the total lifecycle costs of alternatives by including maintenance and disposal costs.
	☐ Consider financial incentives to manage potential impacts on cost.
	☐ Establish a multi-criteria assessment process to evaluate financial and non-financial benefits for alternative options.

Applicability and limitations

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About thinkstep-anz

We're an independent and award winning sustainability firm with offices in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand - and a global reach.

Our team works with you to put sustainability at the heart of your business, to set you up to succeed and inspire you to keep achieving more.

We focus on what matters and use data to understand organisations and their impact. We provide practical resources and ideas that move you ahead.

We create value for organisations like yours, bringing our technical expertise and business know-how to help you tell your story. It's what we've done for the last 16 years.

Our services cover:

Product

- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)
- Environmental Product Declarations (EPD)
- Circular Economy (CE)
- Cradle to Cradle (C2C)
- Material Circularity
- Water footprint
- Packaging

Carbon

- Carbon Footprint
- Scope 3 emissions
- Reduction strategy
- Carbon targets
- Science-based targets (SBT)
- Emission factors

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- Materiality assessment
- Green building
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
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- Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) & Integrated reporting (<IR>)
- B Corp
- CDP

Communications

- Sustainability reports
- Case studies
- Board presentations
- Training
- Copywriting
- Infographics
- Media support

Software

- LCA for experts (GaBi)
- LCA calculator
- Material Circularity Indicator (MCI)
- Corporate sustainability (SoFi)
- MCI tool
- Excel carbon calculator

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