



Experts tell us that we have less than a decade to significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) to avoid the most dire impacts of climate change. Although energy and transportation are often in the spotlight for climate solutions, when you consider the full life cycle of the products that end up in the waste stream the waste sector is actually quite a significant contributor to emissions – and an opportunity for action.

## What is the Circular Economy?

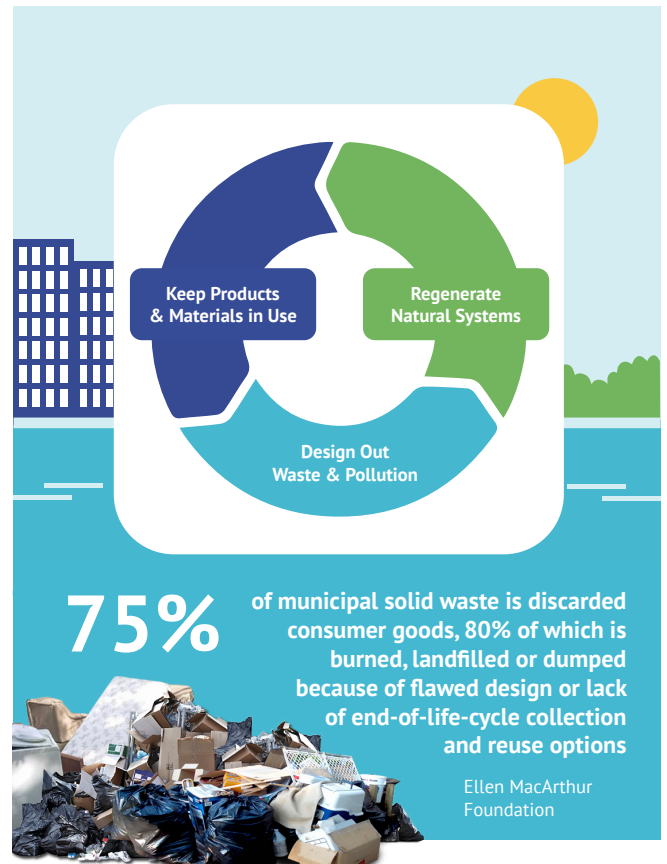
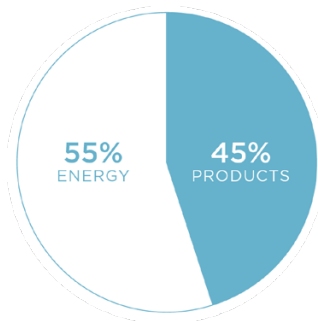
At its core, the circular economy is an innovative alternative to the linear, extractive ‘take-make-waste’ economic system in use across the globe that relies on fossil fuels and unnecessary waste to power growth. A circular economy at its best will reduce waste and emissions, improve public health, and support economic development.

The circular economy system works to target these areas of waste and equip local governments with the tools they need to establish a resilient economic system that manages resources effectively – from design through reuse – and minimizes what remains to enter into the waste stream.

### The Circular Economy as a Key Climate Action Strategy

A report by the t found that 45% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from “producing the cars, clothes, food, and other products we use every day.”

Total Current Global GHG Emissions



### Community Best Practices

- Food waste challenges, like one in [Atlanta](#) that diverted 21,000 meals from six restaurants from the landfill to share with food insecure residents.
- Team up with other communities in your region to ensure consistency and improve recycling rates like [Central Florida Recycles](#)
- Online platform for businesses to exchange reusable materials like the [Austin Materials Marketplace](#).
- Better education and labeling for recyclables like Tucson’s “[Feet on the Street](#)” cart tagging program.
- Incubator to support businesses and entrepreneurs in the field as seen in with the [Resource Innovations and Solutions Network](#) (RISN), a partnership between Arizona State University and the City of Phoenix.



## It takes time and intention to build a culture of circularity in your community.

These are some key areas that local governments have within their locus of control – and a few starter questions:



### LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- **How can you incentivize long-term thinking? Is there a natural person (i.e. Sustainability Director) or department to own it? Is there a Climate Action Plan or similar that can incorporate circularity?**
- Is there a hot topic in your community right now (i.e. plastic pollution)? What is your biggest source of waste? Are there natural partners or local markets that make one sector more appealing (i.e. commercial compost providers)?
- Map out key players you need to engage – businesses, chambers of commerce, research institutions, economic development and other departments – and think about what they are focused on and how to collaborate.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT PURCHASING POWER

- What procurement decisions are in your control? What are high-impact opportunities? Where can you start with local government and school buildings and operations?
- In what way are purchasing decisions made with the product life cycle in mind?
- **If you have private waste haulers, is there a near-term opportunity to work circularity into the next contract? Or focus on upstream opportunities in the interim?**

### INFLUENCE INDUSTRY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- What companies or brands with a local HQ or presence produce products, materials and food in your community?
- Do any have circular economy initiatives or values already in place?
- **Do you have assets – i.e. land for an innovation campus, money for grants – that you could leverage to facilitate circularity?**

### INFLUENCE CITIZEN CONSUMPTION

- What education, awareness and/or behavior change efforts can drive uptake in circular initiatives? Would different programs and incentives encourage citizens to consume less and consider end-use when making purchases?
- **How can you partner with designers and creatives in your community to think through messaging and behavior change opportunities?**
- Are there tools that would help you reach more people?  
Example: [ReCollect](#)

### MAKE SMART INVESTMENTS

- What programs and infrastructure require an up-front investment now but that will make better use of resources and pay dividends in the long run? Will you save money in one place that you could reinvest elsewhere?
- Who are the influencers and decision makers that you need to reach to build support for these investments?
- **Are there local, state or federal grants or pilot programs you could tap into?**

### Additional Resources

- [Beyond 34](#)
- [C40 Circular Economy City Case Studies](#)
- [Circular Economy and Climate Change](#)
- [Circular Design Guide](#)
- [Circular Jobs Monitor](#)
- [Closed Loop Partners](#)
- [Ellen Macarthur Foundation Resources](#)
- [Cities and the Circular Economy](#)
- [NRDC Food Matters](#)
- [Recycling Partnership](#)
- [Sustainable Procurement Playbook for Cities](#)