

**SYNERGY**  
FOUNDATION



# CIRCULAR ECONOMY ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

JUNE 2026

**PROGRAM DELIVERED BY**

**SYNERGY**  
FOUNDATION

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This program sought to create an **inclusive circular economy** in urban and rural communities within the Vancouver Island-Coast region. This program supported existing businesses to **incorporate circular economy practices** into their operations and facilitate regional cluster development to divert waste, enhance circular processes, and stimulate new economic opportunities in these communities.

This program was part of a larger VI-Coast Circular Economy Ecosystem (VICE) Project, spanning five years and four sub projects:

1. Rural Business Transition Training Program
2. Urban Business Transition Training Program
3. Entrepreneurial Training Program
4. Cluster Hub Strategy Development

The Accelerator program, consisting of sub-projects one and two, ran from to March 2024 to March 2026, building off the successful pilot program run in 2022-23 with VICEDA.

# PROGRAM PARTNERS



Pacific Economic  
Development Canada

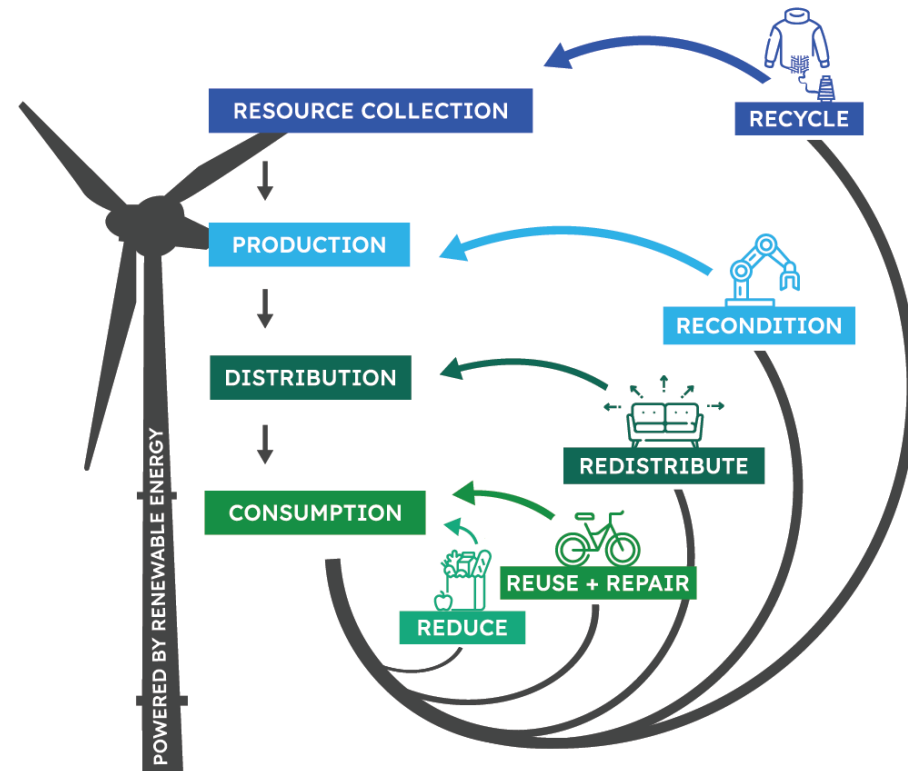
Développement économique  
Canada pour le Pacifique



# WHAT IS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

The **circular economy** is an economic system designed to eliminate waste and pollution, circulate products and materials, and regenerate nature.

Under this model, materials recirculate within the supply chain through reduction, reuse and repair, redistribution, reconditioning, and recycling processes, all powered by renewable energy.



# PROGRAM BENEFITS

The Circular Economy Accelerator program was designed to support businesses to:



Identify savings opportunities and new revenue streams



Reduce waste, energy, water, and emissions



Position themselves as industry and community leaders



Communicate their impact with environmental metrics



Attract investment and quality employees



Build brand awareness and a reputation for sustainable leadership



Make connections with like-minded businesses



Provide data to clients who require ESG reporting

# PARTICIPANT JOURNEY

1 Business signs up for the program via online intake form

2 Business has kick-off call with their advisor from Project Zero and gathers baseline data

3 Advisor conducts site visit at business' facility

4 Business receives personalized 5-year sustainability roadmap and has review call with advisor

5 Business gets further support with 6-month and 1-year check-in calls

The **sustainability plan** that each business received included:

- 35-40 actionable and practical recommendations to reduce energy, water, waste, and emissions and associated costs
- Insights into adopting green technologies and innovative practices to boost efficiency and revenue
- A clear roadmap with estimated costs, timelines, and recommendations for funding opportunities
- Environmental metrics that provide a current baseline and potential reductions

# ASSESSED AREAS OF CIRCULARITY

Circular advisors collected baseline data for waste, water, energy, and fuel use and assessed each business' performance in eight areas of circularity:



Eliminate &  
Reduce



Reuse  
Internal



Reuse  
External



Procurement



Diversion



Leadership  
& Training



Redesign &  
Innovation



Water,  
Energy, & Fuel

# BUSINESS PARTICIPANTS

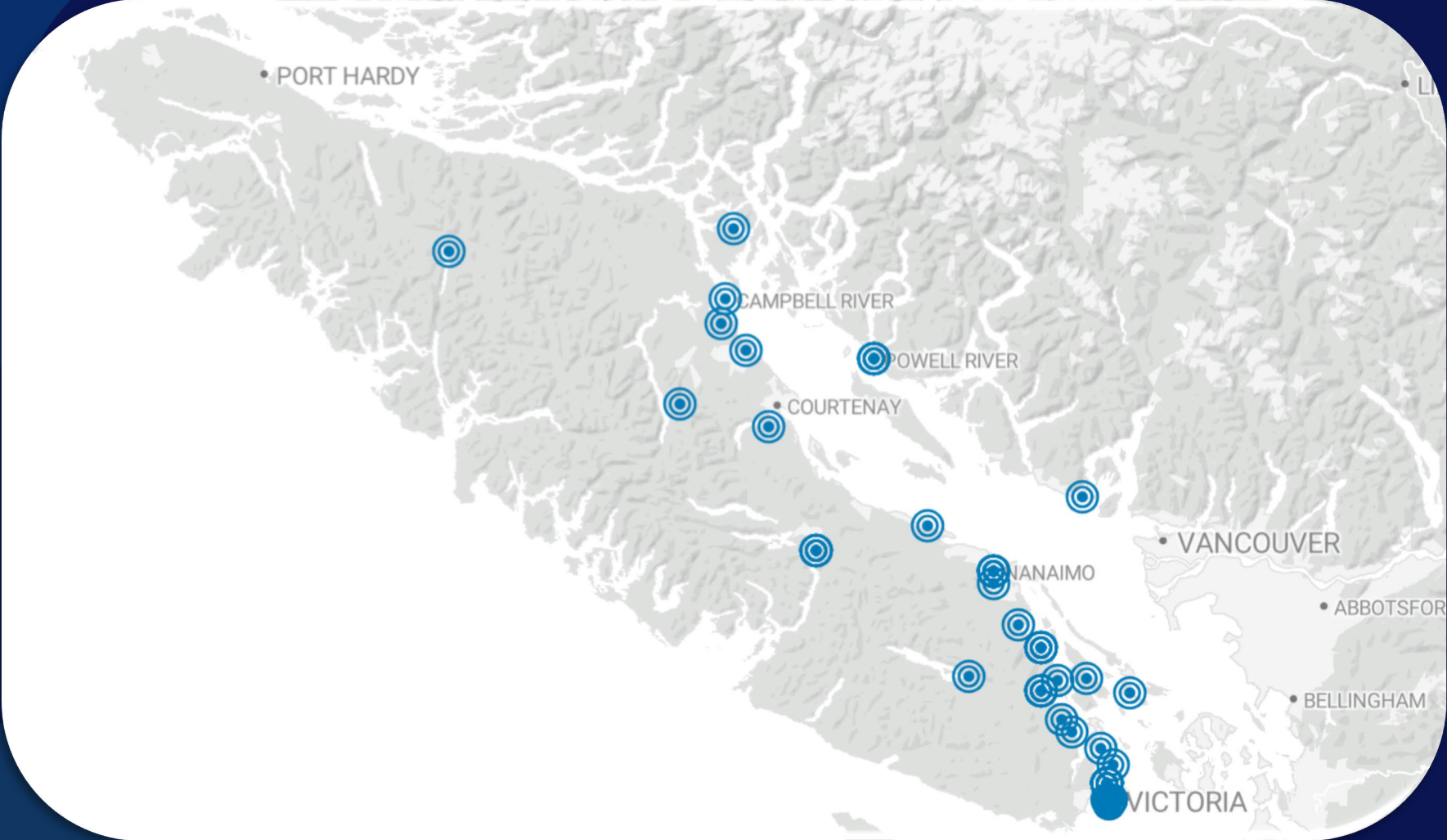
**77 businesses** from across the Vancouver Island-Coast region participated.

All Complete Contracting  
Antidote Distilling co.  
Benson Cabinetry & Millwork  
Berwick Royal Oak  
Big Dig Em Excavating LTD  
Blake Lewis Construction Ltd.  
Campbell River Airport YBL  
Chemainus Forest Products  
Chemainus Theatre Festival Society  
Chims Cabins  
Coastal Cookery  
Copper Canyon Timber  
Country Chic Paint  
Courtyard by Marriott Nanaimo  
Cowichan Exhibition  
Dolans Concrete  
Duncan Garage Cafe & Bakery  
Eagle Wing Tours  
Floyd's Diner  
GBT Construction  
Green Thumb Nurseries  
Habit Coffee  
Hanson Land and Sea  
Heartfelt Farm and Therapy  
INEO Employment Counselling Inc.  
Inn at Laurel Point

Inn on Long Lake  
Irene's Bakery  
Island Bliss  
Jemico  
Keating Farm  
Laketown Ranch  
Lewis Sheet Metal  
Live Edge Design  
Local Pizza  
Lockwood Farms  
Lumberworld  
Macaloney Brewers & Distillers Ltd.  
Maple Bay Marina  
Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham Oyster Bay  
Mill Bay Marina & Bridgemans Bistro  
Modern Windows  
Mount Cain Alpine Park Society  
Naturally Pacific Resort  
Origin at Longwood  
Oswego Hotel  
Owl's Nest Bakery Bistro  
Post and Purlin Forest Products  
Power To Be Adventure Therapy Society  
Prince of Whales  
Recycle Matters  
Ron Anderson and Sons Ltd.

Salt Spring Sea Salt Ltd.  
Searle's Auto Repairs  
Shuck Taylor's  
Soap Exchange  
Spinnakers  
St. Jean's Cannery  
Strathcona Park Lodge  
Summerhill Fine Homes  
T&R Contracting  
Tall Tree Health  
The Bottle Depot  
The Grand Hotel Nanaimo  
The Makehouse Co-op  
Tigh-Na-Mara Resort  
Toolpath Design  
Townsite Brewing  
Tree Island Yogurt  
Vancouver Island Conference Centre  
Viberg  
Victoria Women In Need Community Cooperative  
VMAC Global Technology  
Wescon Cedar Products Ltd  
Wildwood Nurseries Ltd.  
Wolf Brewing Company Ltd.  
Yellow Pt. Cranberries

# BUSINESS PARTICIPANTS

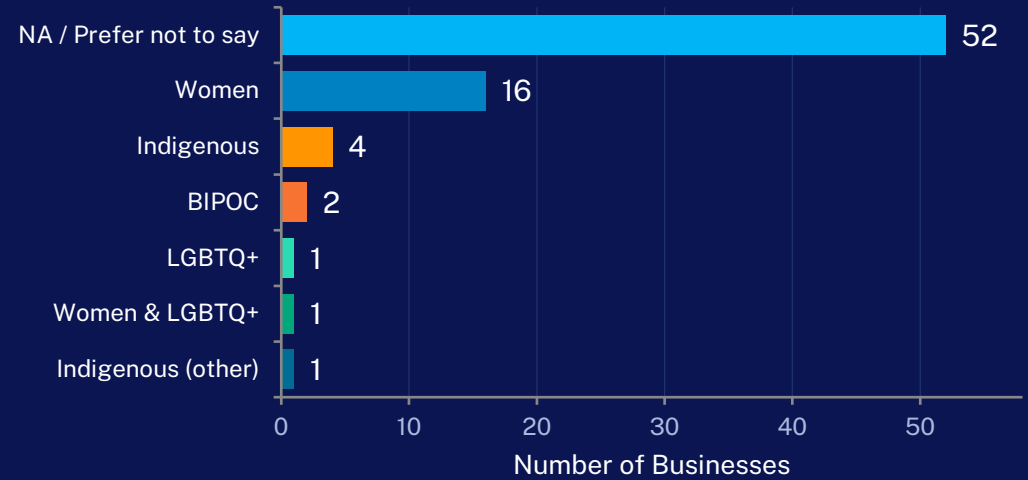


# PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

## URBAN VS. RURAL

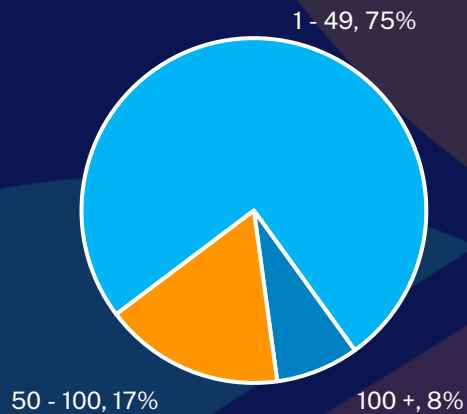


## OWNERSHIP GROUP

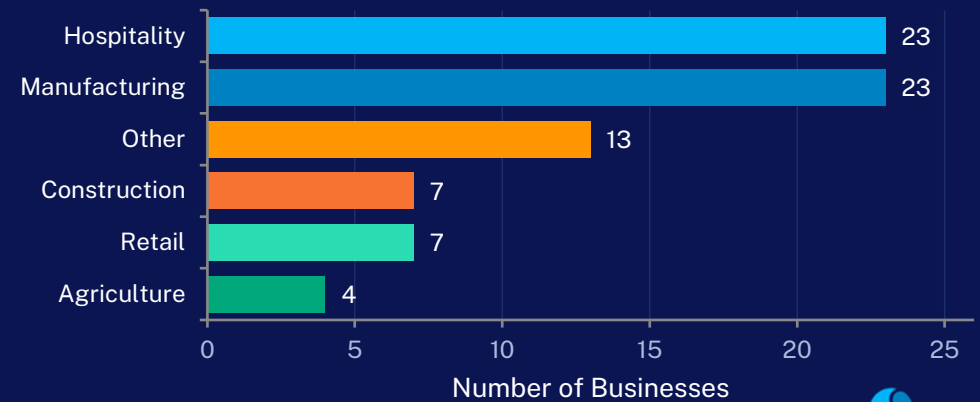


Ownership group data reflects self-reported responses; NA includes non-responses.

## BUSINESS SIZE (FULL TIME EQUIVALENTS)



## INDUSTRY





# PROGRAM IMPACT

# IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES

Circular opportunities identified and percentage circularity were calculated from cumulative data gathered during each site assessment for the **77 participating businesses**.



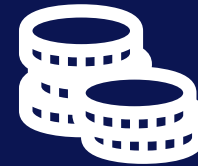
**3334**

Total Circular  
Opportunities  
Recommended



**54%**

Average %  
Circularity



**\$1.45M**

Potential  
Annual Expense  
Savings

# ASSESSMENT IMPACT

The following savings could be realized if businesses were to implement each action from their sustainability plan:



**33,326 m<sup>3</sup>**

Potential Annual  
Water Savings



**2,716 tCO<sub>2</sub>e**

Potential Annual  
Emissions Reduced



**352,775 kg**

Potential Annual  
Waste Diverted



**2507 MWh**

Potential Annual  
Energy Saved



**566,302 L**

Potential Fuel  
Usage Reduced

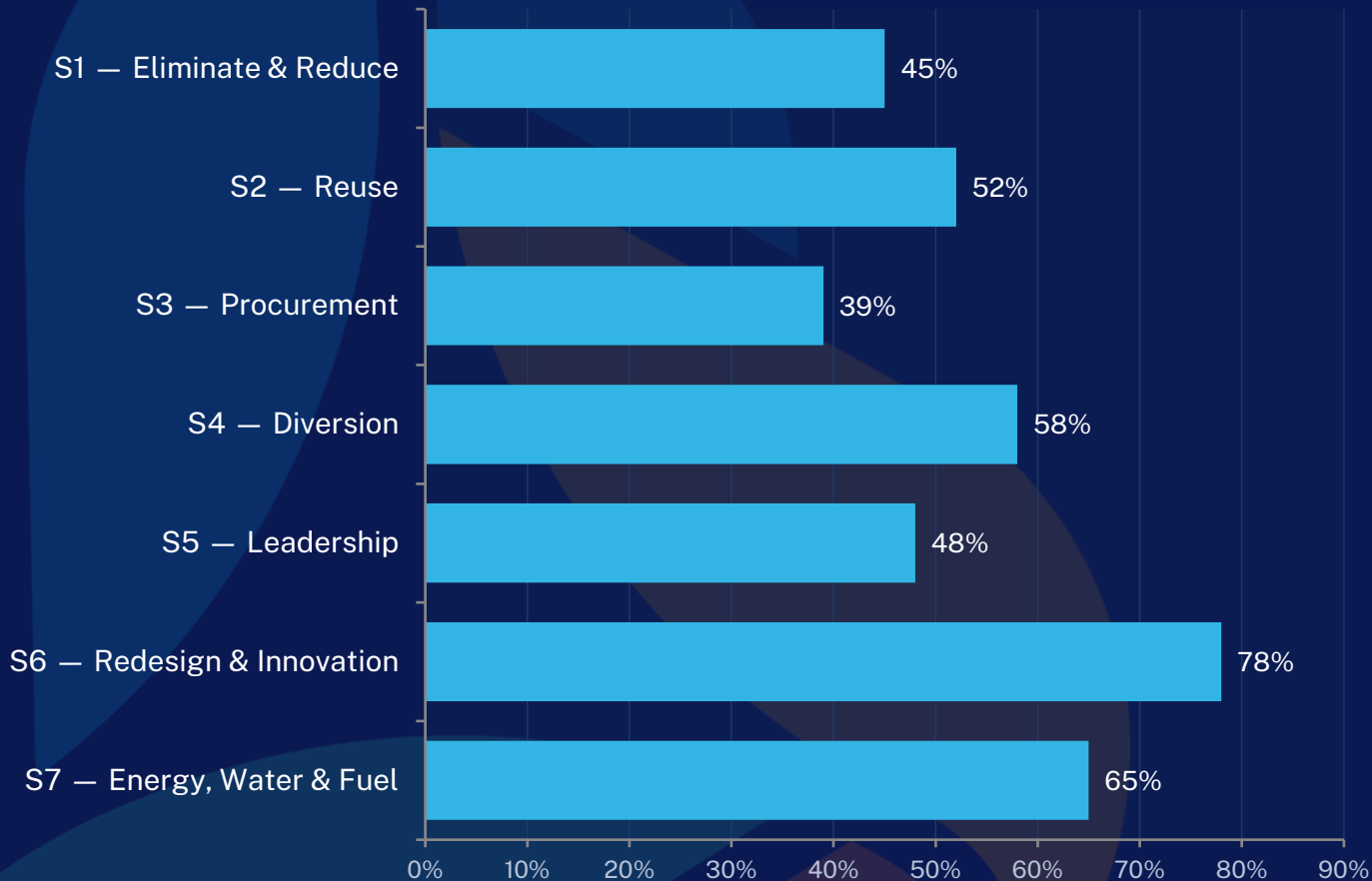


**3,898 GJ**

Potential Natural  
Gas Reduced

*This impact captures potential reductions from measurable actions only. Additional savings may be realized through implementation of further actions.*

# OPPORTUNITIES BY OPERATIONAL AREA



Average circularity score by CE category based on 77 assessments.

## STRENGTH: REUSE & INNOVATION

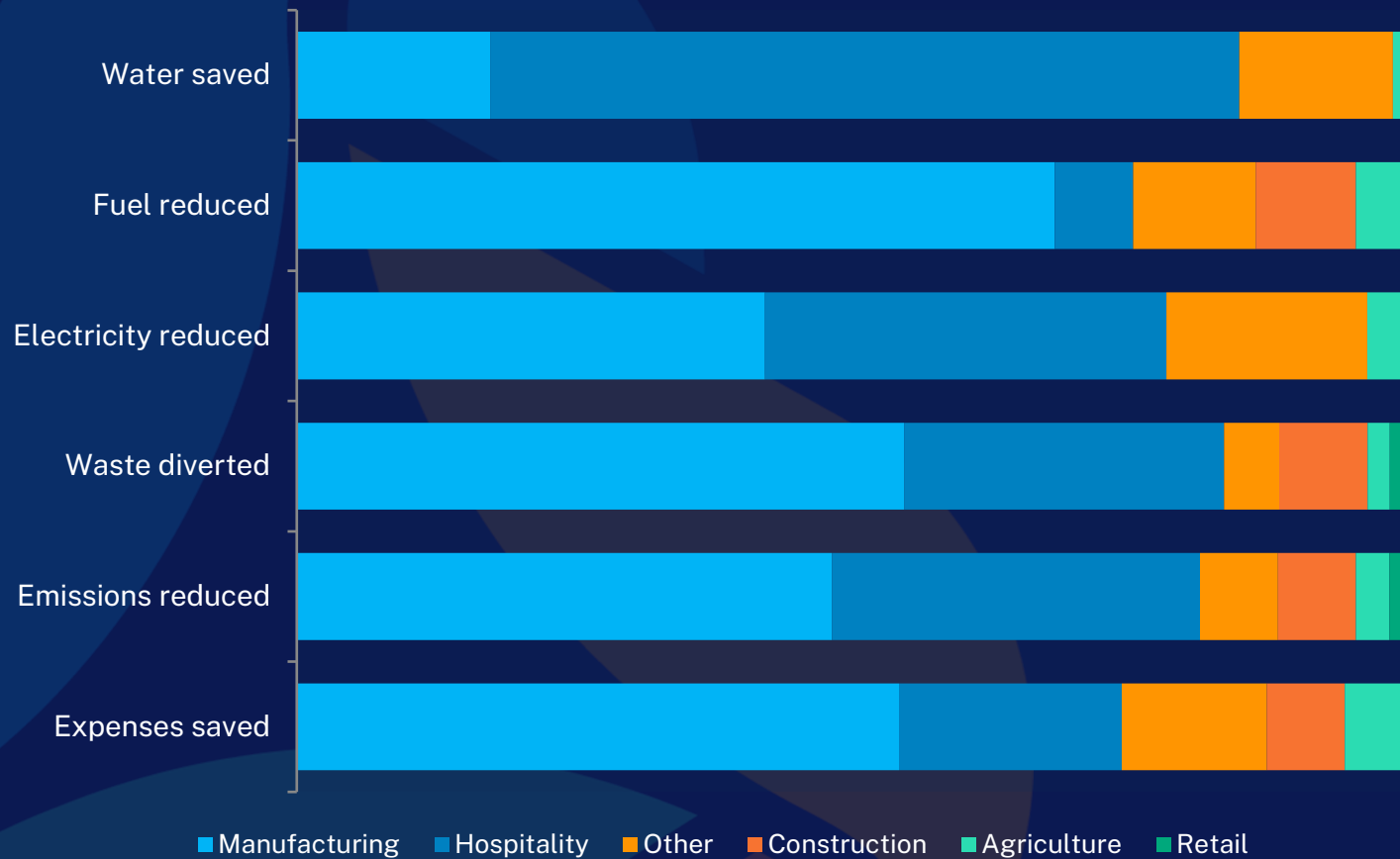
Businesses were strongest in material reuse. Examples include:

- **Laketown Ranch** covering festival grounds in turf discarded from schools
- **Yellow Point Cranberries** upcycling demolition aggregate into dikes
- **Power To Be** using fallen wood to create paths and benches

## OPPORTUNITY: PROCUREMENT

The largest opportunity area was procurement. From formalizing sustainable purchasing policies to engaging suppliers on packaging and sourcing, there is significant room for the region's businesses to embed circularity into how they buy.

# INDUSTRY TRENDS

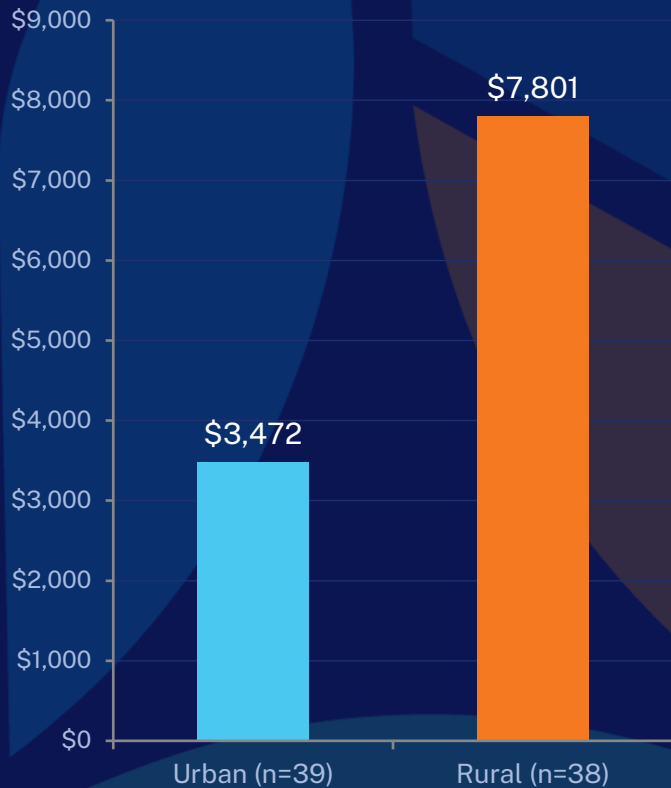


**Manufacturing** (30% of participants) represented the largest share of potential savings for almost every impact metric, including 54% of total potential expense savings, 55% of potential waste diverted, and 42% of potential electricity savings. This reflects the sector's heavy equipment use (e.g., kilns, dryers, planers, heavy vehicles) that have high energy and fuel demands, and large volumes of input materials (e.g., timber, plastics, food) that make small changes add up quickly.

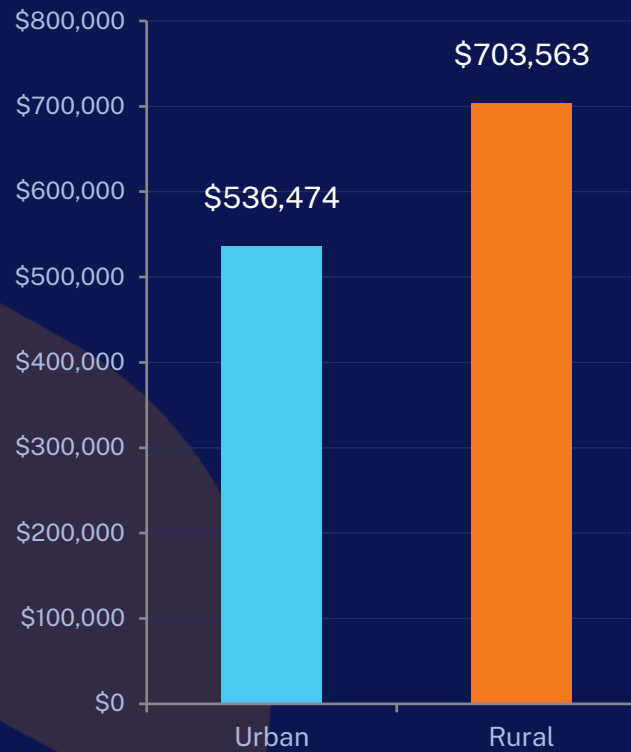
**Hospitality** (28% of participants) lead on water and natural gas savings, largely due to the sector's high building operations and infrastructure demands.

# URBAN VS. RURAL

## MEDIAN SAVINGS PER BUSINESS



## TOTAL COST SAVINGS IDENTIFIED



There was greater program interest in rural areas than anticipated, resulting in a 50:50 split between urban and rural participants.

Over half of rural participants (53%) work in manufacturing, construction, agriculture, or food production, industries with higher overall environmental and cost impact.

- 20 of 38 rural businesses (53%) are in manufacturing or construction
- Only 10 of 39 urban businesses (26%) are in those sectors

Rural businesses tend to operate with a higher degree of interdependence — relying on each other for inputs, services, and markets in ways that urban businesses, with greater access to large suppliers and services, typically do not.



# PROGRESS AND TRENDS

# PROGRESS TO DATE

Follow-up calls with **twenty-eight** business participants shed light on their progress towards circularity so far.

**1294**

**CIRCULAR OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED**

**310**

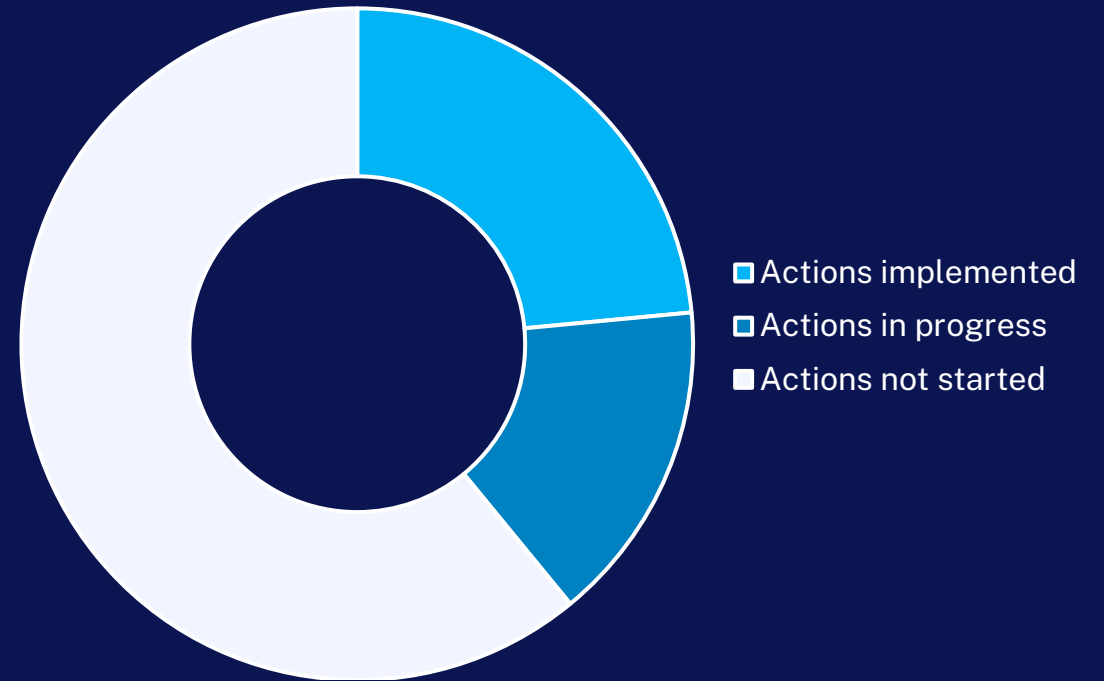
**ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED**

**193**

**ACTIONS IN PROGRESS**

**39%**

**ACTION ENGAGEMENT RATE**



# TRENDS IN TAKING ACTION

Check-in calls with 28 business participants reveal the following emerging trends:



## LEADERSHIP

Businesses with higher leadership scores, and/or who have formed a Green Team, sustainability committee, or appointed a climate lead tend to implement more actions.



## FUNDING

Initiatives with rebates or grant funding available are more likely to be implemented.



## CONNECTION

Interest in local collaboration was high, but few businesses had the connections or capacity to act on it. Urban businesses in particular tended to operate independently, missing opportunities to share resources, exchange waste streams, and source locally.



## TIMELINE

Actions that are easy to implement or had a low capital cost were more likely to be implemented. More robust actions take longer to implement.

Actions that businesses were most likely to implement first include:

### COST-SAVINGS INITIATIVES

Upgrading energy and lighting, installing low flow aerators on taps, reducing pick-ups of waste/laundry etc.

### WASTE DIVERSION IMPROVEMENTS

Improving waste diversion station bins, signage, and sorting systems

### SINGLE-USE PLASTIC REDUCTION

Switching to reusables, refillables, or bulk dispensers

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



## Cardboard



**Naturally Pacific Resort** is now donating cardboard to **local farmer** for their gardens

## Sawdust



**Live Edge Design** exploring partnership to divert their sawdust into briquettes through **Wescon Doors**

## Bulk Ordering



**Island Bliss Farm** exploring opportunities to place bulk orders with other **Quadra Island-based businesses**

## Excess Food



**Vancouver Island Conference Centre** partnered with **Second Harvest** to redirect excess food from events to community food security initiatives.

## Brewery Bags



**Townsite Brewing** is sending brewery bags to **Post and Purlin** to use for materials sorting and to a **local artist** to upcycle into cushions.

Power to Be is a non-profit with the mission to help people living with a disability or barrier access nature.

Its 78-acre campus on Prospect Lake in Saanich serves as its hub for operations, education, and habitat restoration.



Picture Credit: [Power to Be](#)

# POWER TO BE

**GOALS:** Identify opportunities to connect people, place and planet.

## **OUTCOMES:**

### **Reuse:**

- ✓ Fallen wood used to build pathways and benches. Using donated building materials (e.g., reclaimed wood) for projects.

### **Efficiency:**

- ✓ Installed 60 new solar panels.
- ✓ Switching mobile equipment from fossil fuel to battery-powered.

### **Leadership & partnerships:**

- ✓ For events hosted onsite, set waste diversion goals and added communication in written agreements around leave-no-trace.
- ✓ Partnerships:
  - ✓ Arbor Canada: provided site access for training in exchange for arborist work
  - ✓ Pulling Together Saanich: partnering on habitat restoration projects
  - ✓ Local school district: connected with trades program for milled wood project
  - ✓ Local horticultural college: connected for site planning and education
  - ✓ Local food organizations: discussing plans for onsite food production

# CHALLENGES AND MOTIVATIONS

This program ran during a time of significant economic challenges, including tariffs imposed by the USA and consequent uncertainty, high inflation, workforce shortages, and growing concern about a potential recession.

Across industries, businesses became motivated by **cost savings** much more than they were at the beginning of the program.

Motivation differed based on industry and customer values:



**Tourism and hospitality** tended to be more motivated by brand image and guest perception.



**Built environment and manufacturing** tended to be more motivated by cost savings, efficiency, and economic drivers.

# COST SAVINGS

Several businesses realized annual cost savings after implementing recommendations from their reports.



## Restaurant

**\$3,000** reduced paper towel costs after installing hand dryers  
**\$1,600** saved after swapping to recyclable coffee cups



## Hotel A

**\$5,800** saved by reducing waste pickup frequency  
**\$6,000** saved by swapping plastic water bottles for water refill stations  
**\$3,000** saved by swapping staff water tower for tap water  
**\$16,200** saved by eliminating single-use plastic packaging on slippers  
**\$5,880** saved by cutting down on garbage collection frequency



## Hotel B

**\$20,000** saved by reducing guest laundry frequency



## Food & Beverage Producer

**\$75,000** saved by switching to new packaging containing less material



# INTERNAL BARRIERS TO TAKING ACTION



Common challenges that businesses have faced when implementing suggested actions from their assessments include:



**Capacity:** Businesses are too busy to implement new products/processes or are prioritizing other areas.



**Cost:** Businesses are more likely to implement low-cost or cost-saving measures than higher cost actions.



**Convenience:** Businesses will implement “low-hanging fruit” actions over ones that change processes or add steps.



**Risk aversion:** Businesses can be hesitant to try new products or processes that are unfamiliar.



**Consumer demand:** Businesses are more likely to implement circular actions if their customers demand it.



**Franchise constraints:** Businesses that are part of a chain have limited leeway to implement changes without approval.

# NATURALLY PACIFIC RESORT

Naturally Pacific Resort is a boutique hotel in Campbell River featuring an 18-hole golf course, a spa, two eateries, banquet space, and an indoor pool and outdoor hot tub.



Picture Credit: [Naturally Pacific Resort](#)

**GOALS:** Reduce energy and waste costs. Continually improve environmental performance.

## **OUTCOMES:**

### **Leadership:**

- ✓ Formed sustainability committee to strategize green initiatives
- ✓ Launched sustainability webpage
- ✓ Achieved Biosphere certification

### **Waste reduction:**

- ✓ Reduced garbage collection and annual hauling expenses
- ✓ Replaced single use water bottles on golf carts with refill stations
- ✓ Swapped staff room water cooler bottles with tap water
- ✓ Switched to a block laundry detergent, reducing packaging waste
- ✓ Exploring reusable and washable slippers for guests

### **Efficiency:**

- ✓ Reduced guest room water temperature by 10°C

# SALT SPRING SEA SALT

Salt Spring Sea Salt is a craft salt producer based on Salt Spring Island, using saltwater from the Salish Sea and flavour infusions made from locally sourced ingredients.



Picture Credit: [Salt Spring Sea Salt](#)

**GOALS:** Reduce propane consumption from energy intensive production process. Reduce carbon footprint and continually improve environmentally friendly choices.

## **OUTCOMES:**

### **Efficiency:**

- ✓ Significant propane reduction by increasing reverse osmosis
- ✓ Planning future equipment upgrades that will reduce energy use and increase production volume
- ✓ Switched from sump pump to gravity-fed saltwater system
- ✓ Installed high efficiency features in new facility, including 100% LED lighting, high efficiency hot water tank with insulated pipes, and insulated doors

### **Waste reduction and procurement:**

- ✓ Reduced parchment paper waste by reusing multiple times for drying salt, resulting in expense savings and waste reduction
- ✓ Added 3 box sizes for shipping (formerly one size) to reduce waste
- ✓ Replaced paper towels with hand towels

# DUNCAN GARAGE CAFÉ & BAKERY

Duncan Garage Café & Bakery is a community hub in Duncan, BC, offering a fully vegetarian menu with locally sourced ingredients, and food and beverage products from local producers.



Picture Credit: [Duncan Garage Cafe & Bakery](#)

**GOALS:** Identify opportunities to reduce waste, improve waste diversion rate, and identify new green practices.

## **OUTCOMES:**

### **Leadership:**

- ✓ Formed a Green Team to engage staff with green goals and added circular economy principles to staff onboarding package
- ✓ Donating excess bread and canned goods to local food bank and women's shelter

### **Purchasing and supplier advocacy:**

- ✓ Developed sustainable purchasing policy
- ✓ Receiving all products from local farmers in reusable totes, eliminating packaging waste
- ✓ Switched to Duncan-based coffee supplier, delivering in reusable buckets and eliminating 1,500 bags per year

### **Efficiency:**

- ✓ Installed strip curtains in walk-in cooler
- ✓ Draft sealed doors

# SYSTEMIC GAPS

Beyond internal barriers, businesses struggle with finding appropriate waste diversion infrastructure when seeking to implement circular practices.



## Limited commercial recycling for key materials

Materials that are not standard recyclables have limited or no commercial recycling options in many regions. Businesses are recommended to divert these streams but lack anywhere to send them. Some materials, such as drywall, also have regulatory barriers that make diverting it prohibitively challenging.



## Island lacks processing infrastructure

Some products, particularly in the food and beverage industry, are sent to the Lower Mainland for processing and/or distribution due to a lack of local infrastructure. Many of these products are then shipped back to the Island, resulting in increased costs and emissions.



## Waste haulers accept limited materials

Businesses typically work with one waste hauler and are beholden to the materials that the hauler accepts, which are generally limited to standard waste streams. This results in otherwise divertable materials (e.g., soft plastics, glass) ending up in landfill. Engaging multiple haulers poses barriers.



## Limited local supply of circular packaging

There are few local suppliers of high-recycled-content or post-consumer packaging. Where available, these options lack variety and are higher cost. Many businesses have trouble navigating which packaging option is best for their context. Businesses wanting to make the switch face supply gaps and cost penalties.



## Rural businesses face compounded gaps

Remote communities lack waste diversion infrastructure, local services, and access to information available in urban centres. Remote businesses are more reliant on each other to support the local economy, while urban businesses generally do not have the same level of interconnectedness.



## Policy and regulation creates additional barriers

Businesses often must direct capacity and capital to complying with evolving regulations rather than investing in circular business practices. Additional policies, such as those around food safety, building codes, cleaning products, also limit circular swaps. There is a lack of movement on provincial EPR and commercial recycling supports.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this program, we recommend the following:

## 1 Create a circular economy innovation fund

Create a funding mechanism to help negate the financial barrier businesses face when seeking to implement circular actions. Costs remain the primary barrier preventing businesses from implementing more capital-intensive impactful measures to increase circularity.

## 2 Expand commercial waste diversion options

There are market and infrastructural gaps in the commercial recycling space. To reduce materials going to landfill, businesses require access to waste depots that accept a variety of materials. Depots also pose an opportunity to house reuse centers on-site. Commercial waste haulers should expand accepted materials beyond standard recyclables.

## 3 Increase resources for circular behaviour

Practical resources with tangible actions, including sector-specific toolkits, template sustainability policies, and guides — would reduce the time and expertise required to act on assessment recommendations.

## 4 Facilitate matchmaking for local collaboration

Low awareness of local diversion options was a recurring barrier. A matchmaking program connecting businesses with diversion services, material recovery outlets, and peer businesses would address this knowledge gap directly. These community connections also strengthen local resilience.

# FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

Here's what some program participants had to say about the Circular Economy Accelerator program:

“

We were delighted to be accepted into the Circular Economy Accelerator Program so we could better understand the environmental impact of our business as it currently exists. Getting that baseline was very helpful - and it highlighted many areas where we could immediately make changes to reduce our footprint. In a few short months we have made big strides to reduce waste and there are many more positive changes coming. The team was very thorough and offered insightful ideas to help us move forward to becoming a net zero waste enterprise.

**Robert Steinbach,  
Salt Spring Sea Salt Ltd.**

“

Being part of the Circular Economy Program has provided us with great awareness of our business processes and the impact we have on the environment. It gave us clear, practical steps to improve our business in ways that are better for the community and the planet, and it's already making a real difference.

**Matthew Huotari,  
Duncan Garage Café & Bakery**

“

The Circular Economy Accelerator Program has been an incredibly valuable resource for the Inn at Laurel Point. The 1:1 support and tailored recommendations helped us identify efficiencies, reduce waste, and implement innovative sustainable practices. The insights and roadmap provided a clear path forward, allowing us to enhance our sustainability efforts while also improving operational efficiency. We highly recommend this program to any business looking to make a meaningful environmental and financial impact!

**Ian Sanghara & Leo Gayosso,  
Inn at Laurel Point**

# LOOKING AHEAD

Synergy Foundation will continue to support the business participants and track progress with check-in calls upon report delivery and at 6- and 12-months.

The findings from this program have informed Synergy's [Circular Hubs](#) project, designed to support economic growth through resource recovery, market development, skills training, innovation, and business support in the forestry-impacted communities of Cowichan Valley, qathet Regional District, and Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District.



# PROJECT ZERO

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