



Year End Report

COHORT 1 | JUNE 30, 2023

NextCycle Washington is a circular economy innovation platform and accelerator designed to support the growth of businesses and organizations working within Washington's waste prevention, reuse, repair, recycling and/or organics recovery industry.

Introduction

Washington State is incubating and accelerating big ideas in material waste prevention, reuse, repair, recovery, recycling, and composting to help grow the state’s circular economy.

The circular economy is based on three principles: eliminate waste and pollution; circulate products and materials at their highest value through waste reduction, material reuse and end of life recycling; and support practices that regenerate, rather than exploit, nature. Conceptually, this approach moves economic activity from a linear model of resource extraction, use and disposal towards a more sustainable system that keeps materials in circulation at the highest value for as long as possible. A circular economy has tangible benefits for the environment, the economy, and society. A circular economy:

- Realizes environmental benefits, as recirculated materials are a substitute for virgin inputs and reduce the significant impacts associated with resource extraction, such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and water usage.
- Represents economic benefits, as recovering materials as inputs for new products creates more jobs than moving that same unit of material through a one-way trip to the landfill.
- Provides social benefits, when done right, by harnessing those jobs and market activities to create economic opportunities and increased access to services for overburdened and underserved communities in both urban and rural areas.

Moving towards this model requires a paradigm shift in the structure of supply chains, processes, and business models. Such a shift requires intentionality, collaboration, and resources. That is where NextCycle Washington fits in.

According to the 2023 [Circularity Gap Report](#), globally, over 92% of our products and packaging follow a linear economy. Only 7.2% of products and packaging follow a circular economy where products and packaging are not discarded at the end of first use, but are recirculated in the economy to be shared, repaired, reused, repurposed, or recycled into a new product. This is a lower number than last reported in the 2021 [Circularity Gap Report](#). Business as usual is clearly not adequately catalyzing this shift. There are examples of successful circular business models, such as bottle to bottle recycling, composting, clothing and gear rental, textile repair. However, these models are limited and often not universal to all conditions and geographies. This is due to unique place-based conditions related to available supply chain infrastructure and feedstocks. Furthermore, much like the renewable energy

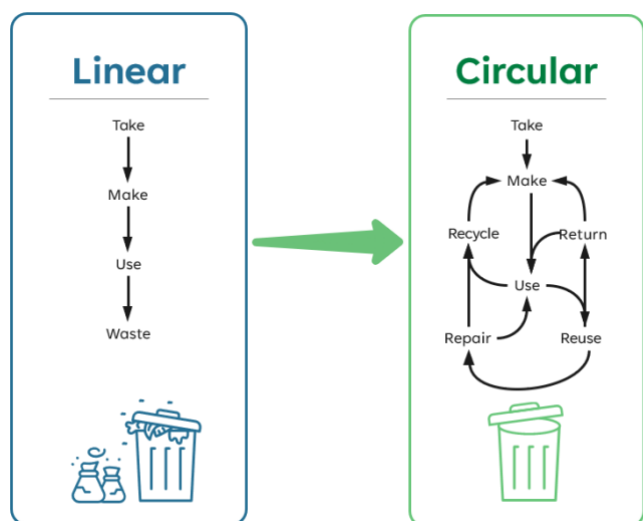


Figure 1. Shift from linear to circular economy

industry two decades ago, economies of scale have yet to be realized resulting in products and services that are typically more costly than the existing alternatives, which do not have the same environmental, economic, and social benefits.

By nurturing circular economy projects, NextCycle Washington helps reduce waste, keeps materials in use longer, and regenerates natural systems while developing equitable local economies. NextCycle Washington prepares businesses and organizations for future investment and funding and improves the impact potential and economic opportunity for participants and the communities in which they reside and operate.

NextCycle was developed by [RRS](#) as a program to prepare recycling businesses and organizations for funding through state grant programs. NextCycle Colorado first deployed in 2018 and NextCycle Michigan kicked off in 2020. As the program evolved it expanded to include any type of approach to circularity, including waste prevention and reuse. The first full year of NextCycle Washington just wrapped up. We are pleased to share the outcomes of the inaugural year.

Our Values

The NextCycle Vision is to move beyond a singular focus on materials when solving for circularity. The work is guided by three pillars (Figure 2).

- **Circularity:** We seek to support solutions where any material is managed with the highest, best use in mind. We do this by evaluating and providing resources to projects based on their potential to prevent waste or divert waste from landfill and incineration through reuse or recycling.
- **Social Equity:** We seek to support solutions that create equitable access to economic opportunities and services to communities and populations that are historically overburdened and underserved. We do this by engaging with these communities through trusted messengers. We lower barriers for the program to be accessible and inclusive of entrepreneurs and community-based organizations from underrepresented communities like Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) veteran, disabled youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and more (LGBTQIA+), and rural communities.

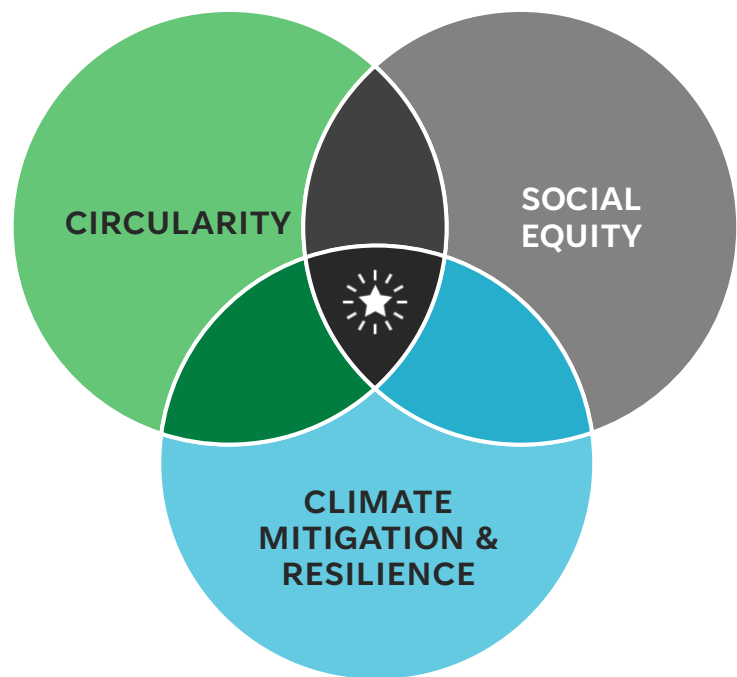


Figure 2. NextCycle Washington values

- Climate Mitigation and Resilience:** We seek to support solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from embodied carbon and/or improve local resilience to climate risks. We do this by supporting projects that have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from a lifecycle perspective by substituting virgin products and inputs with reused products or recycled content. We also do this by supporting projects in frontline communities – those facing the highest risks related to climate disasters – that contribute towards improved resiliency through sharing, caring, repairing, reusing, and recycling materials locally.

Meet the Team

NextCycle Washington is a collaborative program by design. This is evident by the range of public funders of the program to function and the team of contractors who drive and implement the vision. This dynamic, built on partnership and inclusion, is an essential part of the program’s success where the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

Funders



Adrian Tan
King County Solid
Waste Division



Tina Schaefer
Washington State
Department of Ecology



Kirk Esmond
Washington State
Department of Commerce



Kara Steward
Washington Recycling
Development Center



Rob Duff
Washington Recycling
Development Center



Ashima Suhkdev
Seattle Public
Utilities



Vincent Valentino
Seattle Office of
Economic Development



Critical Program Staff from 2023



Bryce Hesterman
Senior Consultant, RRS – Program manager; downstream accelerator track lead; technical support and coaching focused on business planning and circular supply chains



Kamal Patel
Founder – Kamal Designs, Co-founder - Traversal Designs – Co-design and governance lead; technical support and coaching focused on engagement and just transition; and networking extraordinaire



Elizabeth Chin Start
Founder & CEO Start Sustainability Consulting – Upstream accelerator track co-lead; technical support and coaching focused on reuse, share repair and the intersection of waste and equity



Christy Chow
Associate, Cascadia Consulting Group – Upstream accelerator track co-lead; technical support and coaching focused on reuse, share repair and the intersection of waste and Equity



Melissa Radiwon
Communications Consultant, RRS – Communications lead



Joel Schoening
Consultant, RRS – Renew Seed Grant administrator



Lizzy Paul
Consultant, RRS – Program support



Marcus Coleman
Analyst, RRS – Program support



Erin Grimm
Creative Strategist, RRS – Graphic design lead



Amanda Moore
Communications Consultant, RRS – Social media lead



Bridgette Pollaski,
RRS – Photography and video production



May Xie
Cascadia Consulting Group – Events



Ashley Worobec
Co-Founder, Traversal Designs – Co-design co-lead



Laura Polombi
RRS – Administrative support

Program Structure

There were two core programmatic workflows in the 2022-2023 NextCycle Washington Program.

Circular Accelerator

The first core element to NextCycle Washington is a Circular Accelerator program designed to support businesses and organizations that have shown early progress and traction. The accelerator is comprised of two innovation challenge tracks with different approaches to keep material in circulation longer.

- **Upstream Track** - Projects that prevent waste and/or improve and expand reuse, share and repair solutions.
- **Downstream Track** – Projects that recover waste and/or recycle, compost, or utilize repurposed inputs.

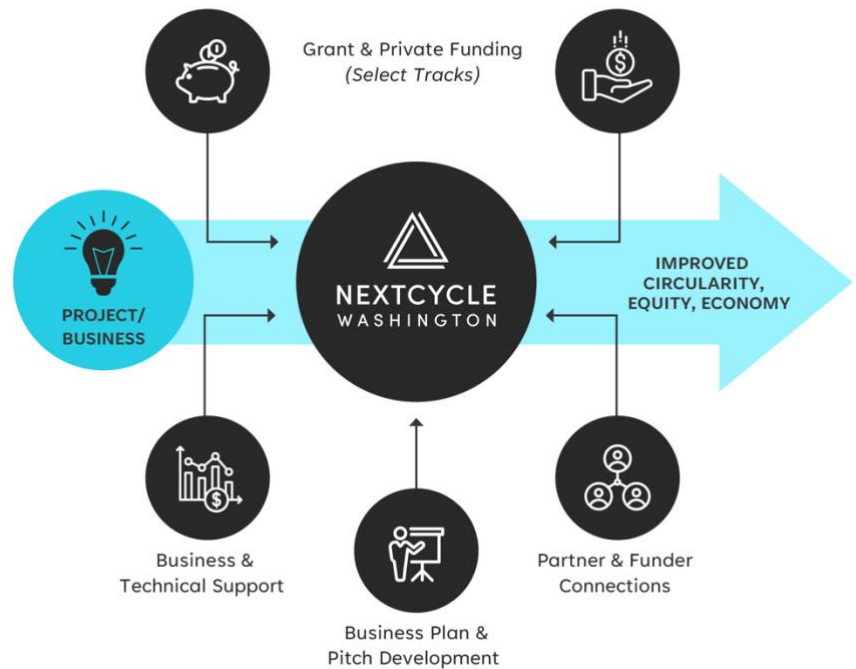


Figure 3. The NextCycle Washington Circular Accelerator Model

Both innovation challenge tracks use a competitive process to select the most promising projects working within Washington’s circular economy that match NextCycle Washington’s values. Selected projects are supported through a six-month program that includes an intensive workshop series, one on one consulting support, networking facilitation and support, business planning, training on social equity principles, and investment readiness assistance. The program culminates with a [Pitch Showcase](#). Figure 3 illustrates the structure of this program.

Renew Seed Grant

The second core element of NextCycle Washington is the Renew Seed Grant program, designed to provide funding and technical assistance for early-stage ventures. Selected projects are supported with up to \$10,000 in reimbursable funding along with dedicated one on one technical support, access to mentors, consultants, and networking to support project execution and growth planning.

Co-Design & Governance

During the design of the NextCycle Washington program the question was posed: ***How can we envision a more equitable circular economy in Washington State?***

To answer this, a collaborative approach was used to inform the process for adapting the basic NextCycle program model for the unique context within Washington State¹ with the goal of making it as inclusive and equitable as possible. Participants in the co-design process came from various backgrounds like private companies, public entities, and community-centered organizations all located and working in Washington State. Co-design is an approach to design that is done with people, not for people, by sharing power, prioritizing relationships, and using participatory means². It employs the following six-step process (Figure 4) to set the stage, co-create, and iterate. Steps one through five were conducted prior to the NextCycle Washington program launch. The first year of NextCycle Washington implementation is an opportunity to implement and learn. Prior to launching NextCycle Washington Cohort 2, the group will revisit the co-design process to iterate and further improve the program design.



Figure 4. Co-design process and how it was used for NextCycle Washington

¹ NextCycle had previously launched in Colorado and Michigan, where it continues to operate.

² Beyond Sticky Notes

We consider the co-design process within the context of public participation, as described by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) in Figure 5. The goal of co-design is to work as much as possible on the right side of the spectrum, where stakeholders and community voices are actively collaborating and in some cases are empowered to make key decisions.

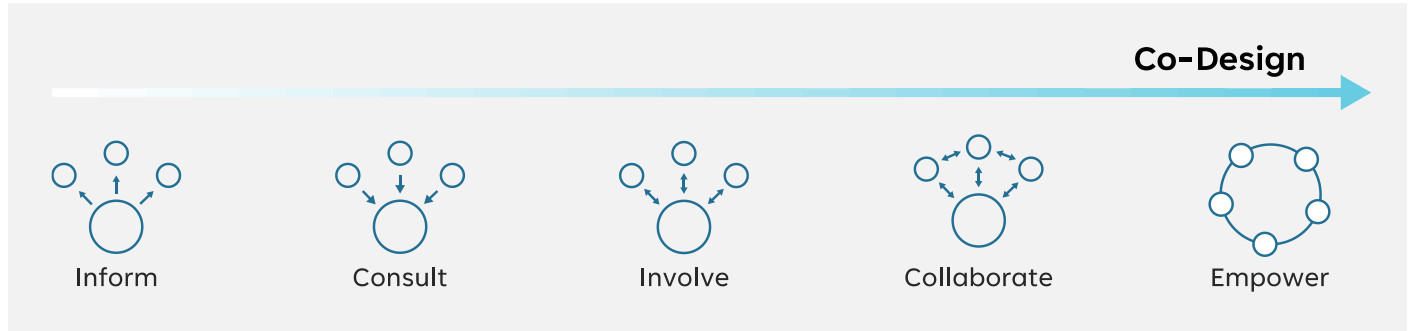


Figure 5. Public participation spectrum

The following priorities and tactics were identified for NextCycle Washington through the co-design process:

1. **Create Accessible Communications** to bring awareness of the available resources to audiences that are often overlooked. This included developing [Circular 101](#) content to ground applicants in new language and connect it to concepts that they already know about. It also included the addition of accessibility and translation tools on the website.
2. **Lower Application Barriers** to improve outcomes for applicants who are under resourced or lack experience in grant writing. This included hosting staff-led office hours, the development of trusted applicant mentors from overlooked rural and BIPOC communities, and hosting virtual “application parties” where applicants, mentors, and staff gathered to address questions and clarifications about the application process.
3. **Share Power with Community** to add transparency, accountability, and perspectives of those with lived experience in the communities that may be impacted by the projects supported by the program. This is done through the development of a program governance circle composed of 50% community voices³ whose role is to observe the implementation of the program and evaluate the extent to which it is meeting the stated program objectives. See description below of program governance to learn more.
4. **Support a robust partner network** of those doing the work to create more support structures for the organizations beyond the boundaries of the program. This is done through developing a partnership network and facilitating introductions with NextCycle Washington teams and by facilitating partnership opportunities between participants.
5. **Improve access to resources for overburdened communities** to ensure that support is distributed equitably where it will have the greatest impact. This is done by including evaluation criteria within the selection process that take into consideration the community and social impacts of the proposed projects.

³ “Community voices” is defined as individuals who have historically been excluded in decision making, including low-income, rural, Black, Indigenous, communities of color, or otherwise marginalized communities.

6. Strengthen Local Community networks by connecting program participants with organizations, institutions, and resources from the communities in which they are focusing. This is done through facilitating introductions to local government agencies, economic development offices, and other businesses and organizations in their communities that could become future project partners, supporters, and/or funders.

After the program launched, the co-design process evolved into a permanent governance structure taking guidance from Priority 3, as described above. NextCycle Washington Governance brings together a diverse group of external subject matter experts and people with lived experience from industry, local governments, and communities to provide oversight and guidance to the NextCycle Washington program. It includes two different functions, as illustrated in Figure 6.

- 1) Program Governance **Circle**: overall program oversight and mission control
- 2) Application Review Circle: evaluating proposals and recommending teams to include in the program

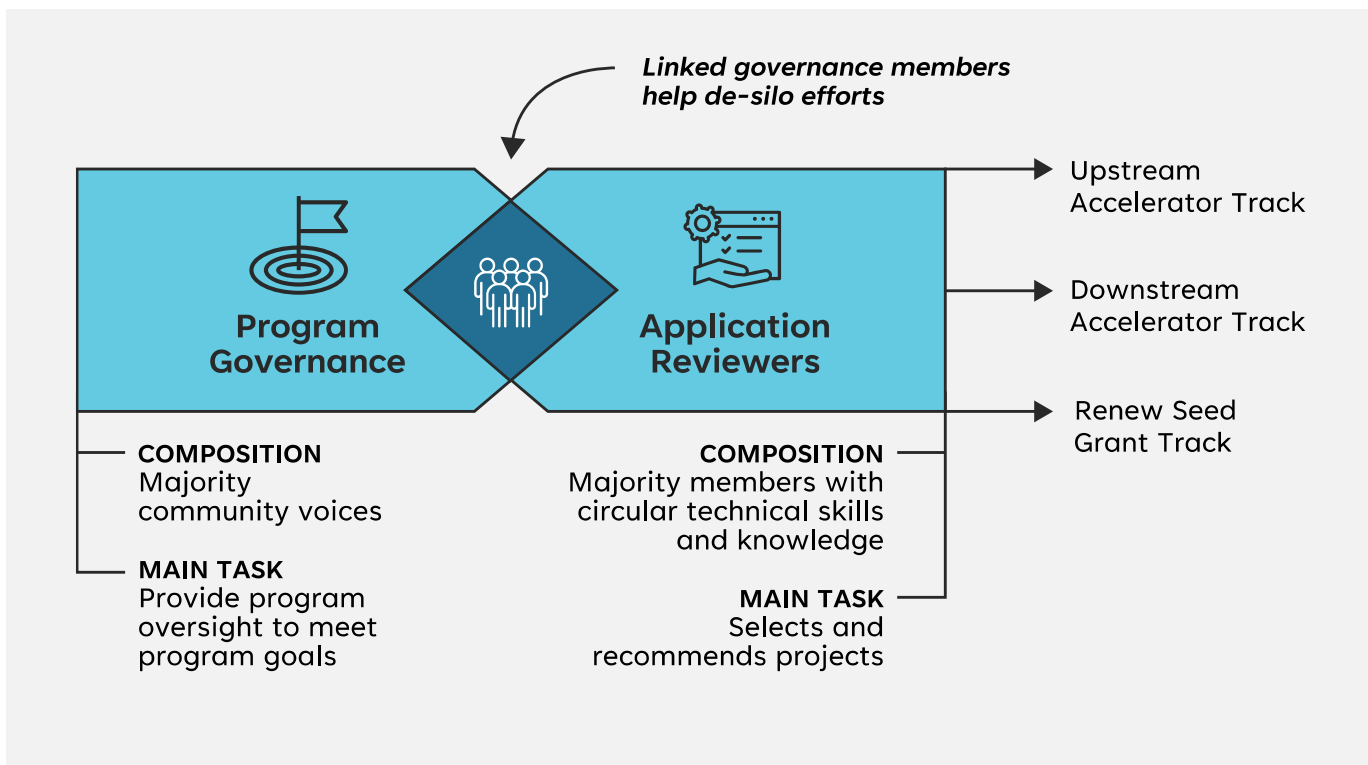


Figure 6. NextCycle governance structure

Partners

A key function of the NextCycle Washington program is developing partnerships. These relationships take many forms and are essential to scaling the impact of the program and its participants. The following are official partners and sponsors, though there are many more loosely defined partnerships.

The following are examples of NextCycle Washington Partners:

- Strategic Partners:** NextCycle Washington has a strategic partnership with PreCycle, a collaboration between the Seattle Good Business Network and Zero Waste Washington that provides support for earliest stage projects, including those still in the ideation phase. In several instances PreCycle helped prepare businesses and organizations to apply for NextCycle as a next step in their progression. NextCycle partners with Precycle through joint communications, sharing of referrals and contribution to respective programming content, mentorship, and coaching. Several NextCycle Washington participants first participated in PreCycle.
- Community Partners:** Seattle Parks Foundation and Communities of Opportunity are valuable community partners. Not only did they co-sponsor the People’s Choice award for the Pitch Showcase, but they are a fiscal sponsor for two community-based organizations participating in NextCycle Washington, Restaurant 2 Garden and Duwamish Valley Sustainability Association.
- Funding Partners:** Closed Loop Partners views NextCycle Washington as a source of potential investments for their suite of catalytic investment funds, which includes Venture Capital and Project finance for circular infrastructure. They provide content during the accelerator workshop series to help demystify the circular funding landscape, participate in the Pitch Showcase, and consider participants for funding.



Figure 7. NextCycle Washington Partners and Sponsors

NextCycle Washington is always seeking to expand its network of partners. Anyone interested in becoming a partner can contact NextCycle Washington at nextcyclewashington.com/contact.

Outcomes and Impacts

Following the vision and mission of NextCycle Washington the outcomes and impacts being measured include the following:

- **Waste Diversion** – the extent that materials are being diverted away from the disposal stream and towards a circular system of waste prevention, share, repair, reuse, recycling, and organic recovery.
- **Climate Benefits** – The extent that this diversion contributes to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions or other climate impacts compared to the status quo.
- **Economic Stimulation** – the amount of investment raised, and jobs created through these ventures.
- **Social Equity** – the extent that economic opportunity and access to services is distributed to overburdened and underserved communities, considering both demographics and geography.

Outcomes

In the first year of NextCycle Washington, 15 teams participated in the Circular Accelerator and 41 teams received over \$400,000 in small reimbursable grants up to \$10,000.

One unique aspect of the program is that it targets social enterprises broadly, which may represent either for-profit or non-profit organizations. Within this first cohort 58% of participants were businesses and 42% were non-profit organizations. Descriptions of participating businesses and organizations can be found at nextcyclewashington.com/teams.

As described in the co-design tactics above, extra effort was given to reach often overlooked populations, such as rural, women, BIPOC, and other marginalized

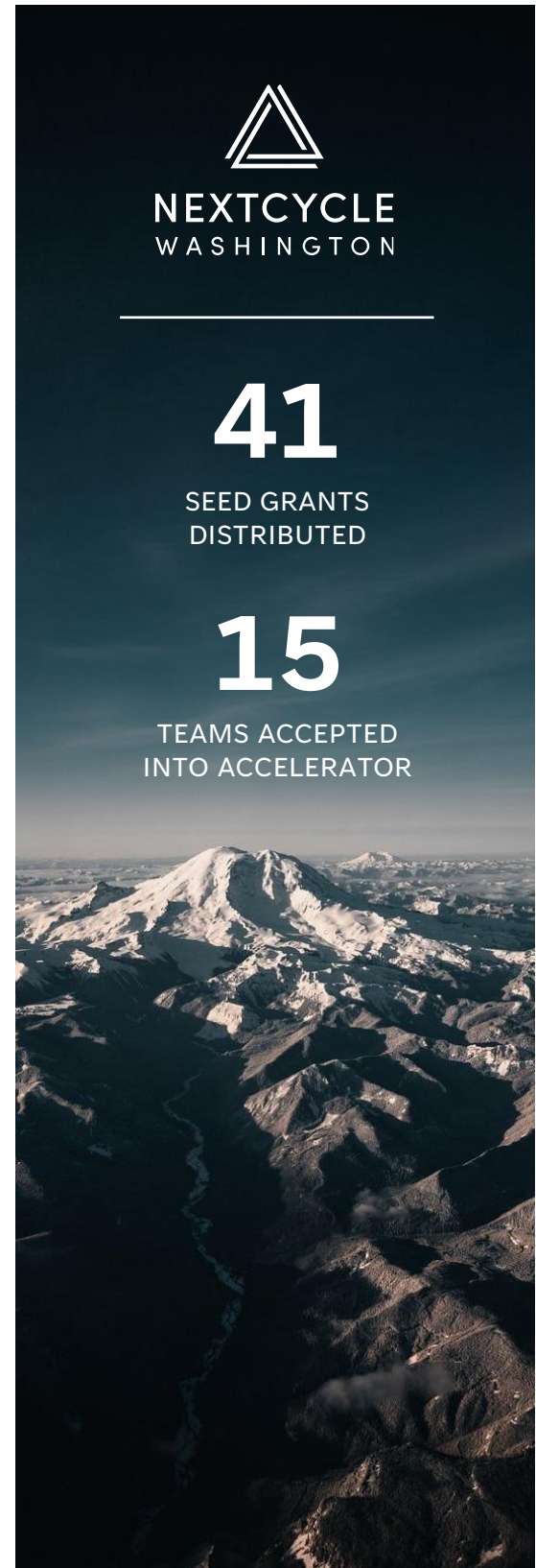


Figure 8. NextCycle Washington outcomes

communities. The figures below demonstrate the extent that the program succeeded in reaching these populations and communities.

Figure 9 presents the geographic distribution of participants. Selected teams represent all the main regions within Washington State. Some areas that had a dedicated and active applicant mentor, such as King County, Spokane, and Okanogan County experienced a boost in selected applicants.

Figure 10 presents demographic representation of the selected organizations based on their leadership. Over 60% of participants were women and/or minority-led enterprises. This is seen as an early success for the program, particularly the extent of support for women-led ventures. However, there is still work to do.



Figure 9. Geographic distribution of participants

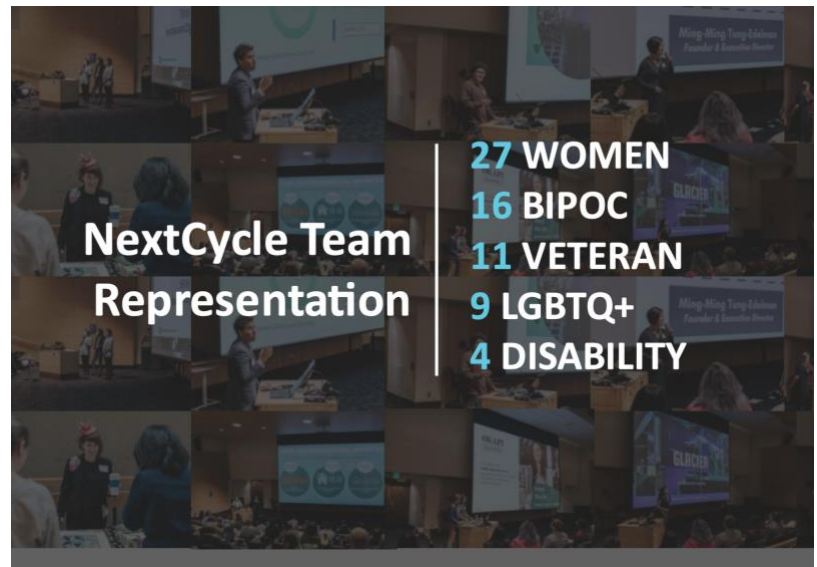


Figure 10: Demographic representation of NextCycle participants



The participants focused on a wide range of materials, with plastics, mixed materials, organics, and textiles as the most often targeted materials (Figure 11). The interventions pursued across all teams trended towards upstream solutions, as shown in Figure 12.

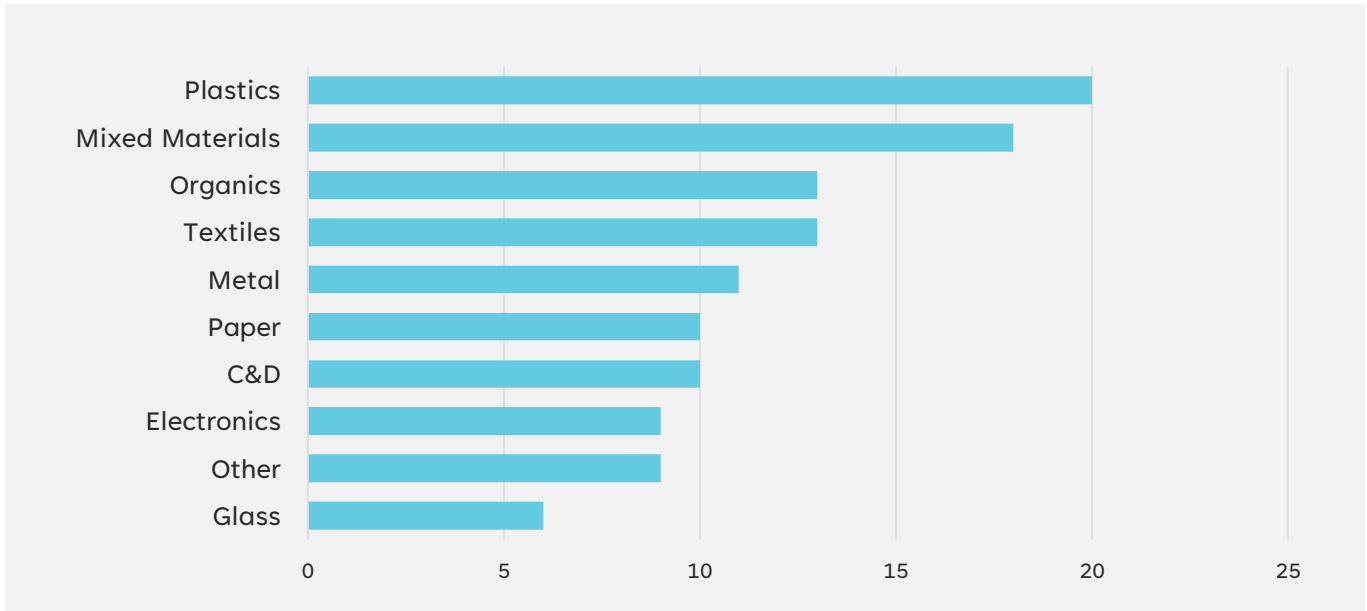


Figure 11. Material focus of NextCycle participants

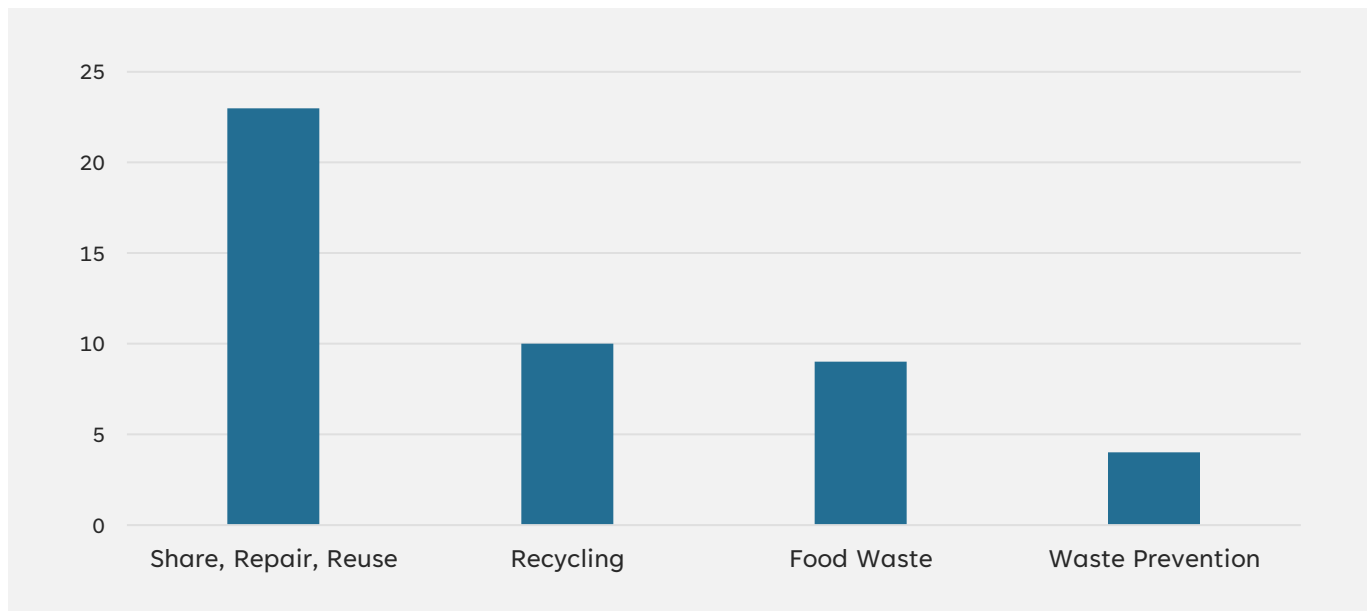


Figure 12. Type of circular intervention



Impacts

NextCycle has yet to measure impacts of the Renew Seed Grant teams, however, impacts of the accelerator teams have been measured and aggregated (Figure 13).

NextCycle teams...

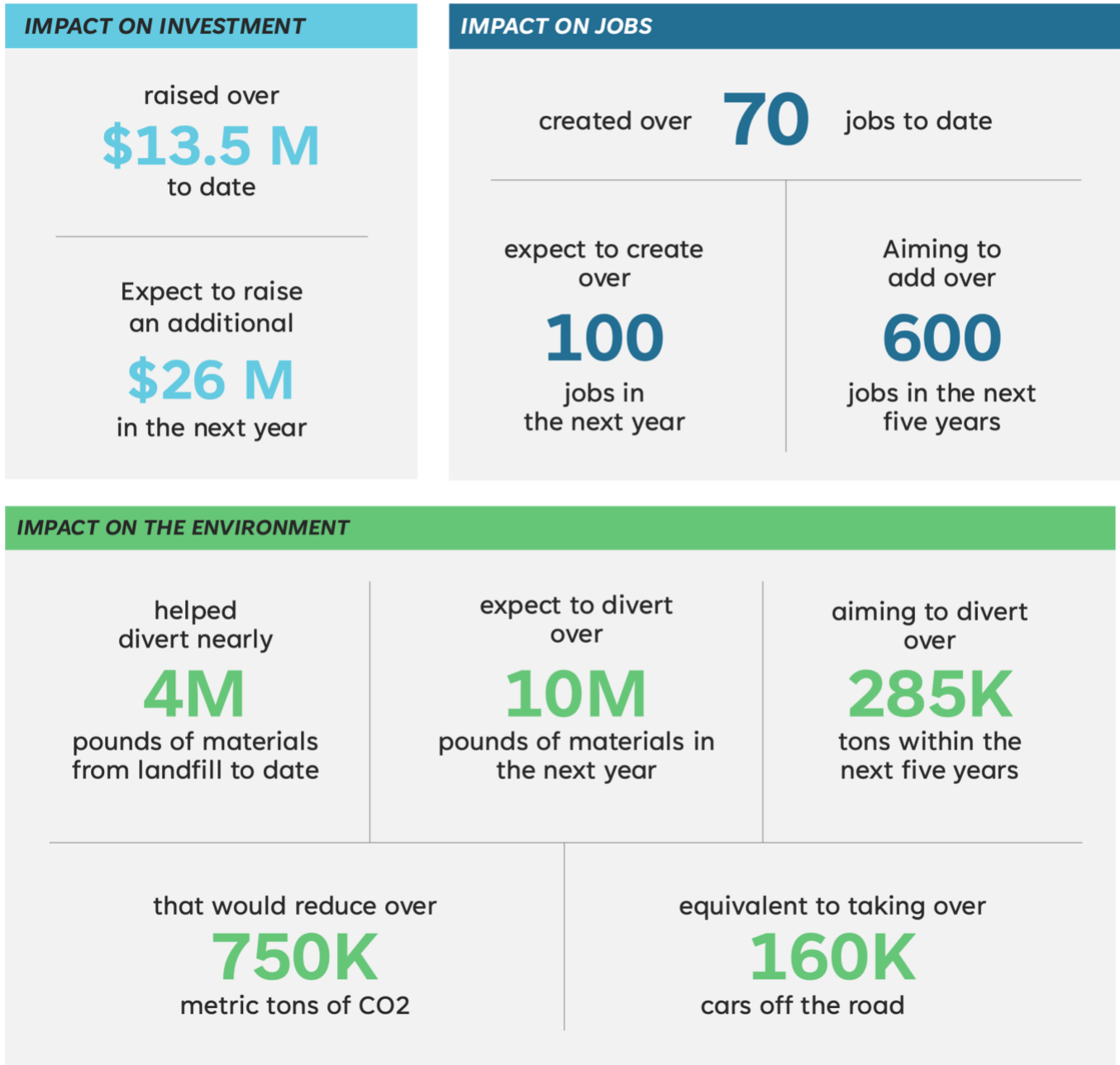


Figure 13. NextCycle Circular Accelerator Team Impact

Selected Team Case Studies



Restaurant 2 Garden

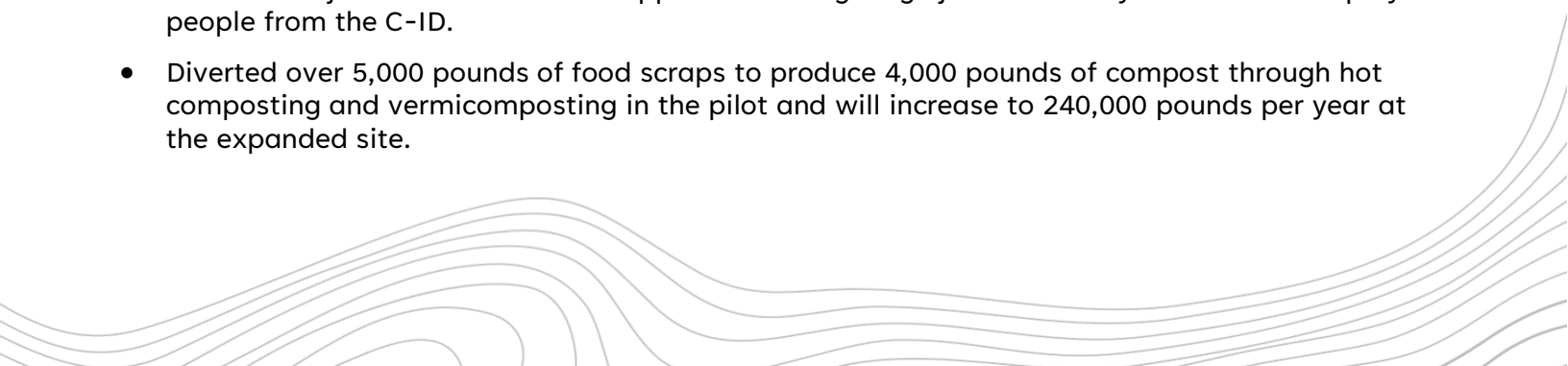
OVERVIEW

Restaurant 2 Garden is working on a community-scale composting model utilizing local restaurant food waste in the Chinatown-International District (C-ID) in Seattle. They transform food waste from local restaurants into nutritious soil amendment to help grow culturally appropriate food locally & continue the circle of life. Their goal is to build from an existing pilot at Danny Woo Community Garden to an expanded operation. The outcome will be a hyper-local community composting operation with improved community participation, reduced contamination and innovative processing techniques using an in-vessel system. The resulting compost will be higher quality than current alternatives with an inspiring story behind that will be attractive to local gardeners and landscapers. Elements explored throughout the cohort centered on business planning, expansion, and site development.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Shifted approach to the project from a non-profit to a socially conscious business mindset.
 - Completed a business plan.
 - Gained a better understanding of the composting landscape locally and nationally, including the market for finished compost.
 - Identified larger piece of land to expand operations and currently in negotiations to secure the site.
 - Conducted market research focused on service customers (restaurants) and potential customers for finished compost.
 - Gained credibility that has translated into media attention.
 - Developed [website](#).
 - Won the Community Impact Award at the NextCycle 2023 Pitch Showcase.
-

IMPACTS

- Has raised \$257,000 since fall of 2020 and is seeking another \$200,000 for expansion.
 - Created 1.5 jobs to date and will support four living wage jobs within a year for underemployed people from the C-ID.
 - Diverted over 5,000 pounds of food scraps to produce 4,000 pounds of compost through hot composting and vermicomposting in the pilot and will increase to 240,000 pounds per year at the expanded site.
- 

Refugee Artisan Initiative




OVERVIEW

Refugee Artisan Initiative (RAI) partners with refugee and immigrant women to foster an inclusive, prosperous transition to the US through artisan skills training and micro business development. They develop products using upcycled textile waste. RAI entered NextCycle Washington to get support in developing a new line of products using retired wildfire hoses. The theory is that with increasing wildfires, leftover fire hoses should not contribute to further global warming as the status quo would see these materials incinerated. RAI's innovation lab and talented artisans are a solution to this problem through upcycling. Retired wildfire fire hoses are utilized as a new material that RAI is taking on as part of their circular equitable economy model. They keep fire hoses out of landfills by transporting them from a centralized location and then storing, cleaning, and drying them. RAI then repurposes them into marketable products produced by refugee women in Seattle, a population that experiences 60% unemployment. Each product sale directly contributes to living wages for these women. The focus during the cohort was on developing this new product line and lining up the appropriate steps in the supply chain.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Developed product prototype.
- Established partnership with NextCycle Washington cohort team Book Hill Group to design firehose transportation and cleaning process.
- Conducted market analysis through consumer and retailer surveys.
- Won the NextCycle Washington Pitch Showcase Upstream Award and People's Choice Award.
- Selected as a keynote speaker at GreenBiz Circularity23 conference.

IMPACTS

- Has an annual budget of over \$1.7 million. Raised \$130,000 for the firehose project while participating in the accelerator program.
 - Diverted over 15,000 pounds of textiles in 2022 and 2,000 pounds of firehoses to date. Has the potential to divert many times that, depending on product sales.
 - Overall, has created 34 jobs to date for refugee women and is expecting to grow to 100 jobs within five years.
- 

The Glass Packaging Institute (GPI) & Beverage Industry Glass (B.I.G) Recyclers



OVERVIEW

The national trade group Glass Packaging Institute (GPI) and Beverage Industry Glass (B.I.G.) Recyclers came into the NextCycle Washington program separately with differing visions for increasing glass recycling in rural parts of Washington. When they met and shared their respective plans it immediately became clear that they could become more effective by joining forces. And thus, a partnership was born with the goal to develop a hub and spoke system for glass recycling in Central Washington. Clean glass has market value and can be recycled indefinitely in a circular economy with a lower environmental footprint than using virgin materials. The cost and logistics of moving this heavy material from Central and Eastern Washington to the recyclers west of the Cascades have created previously insurmountable hurdles. By establishing a regional hub and spoke system, economies of scale and transportation efficiencies can unlock the potential for recycling source separated glass from large generators such as wineries, tap rooms, and restaurants. The partnership was the perfect match, as GPI represents the glass manufacturers and recyclers who want the recycled cullet, while BIG Recyclers has local connections to wineries and communities. Together they are accomplishing what they would have been unable to do alone. The focus of the accelerator was establishing a new entity to run the project, develop sites to house the first hub and spokes, refine the operating model and pricing to be financially viable, sustainable, and scalable, and prepare to launch.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Conducted market research to all wineries and hospitality businesses in Walla Walla Valley with over 90% in favor of the proposed model and fee structure.
- Initial hub (Pasco) and two spoke locations (Walla Walla and Benton City) have been set up.
- The collection program launched June 6, 2023, and collected over 23 tons on the first day.
- Discussions are underway for at least three new spokes by Q4 2023.

IMPACTS

- Providing access to glass recycling in a rural region.
- Expecting to divert at least 160 tons of glass per year by 2024.
- Projecting up to 1,000 tons of glass diverted per year within five years.
- Expecting to create three to five living wage jobs within a year and 12-15 within five years.

Geer Garage




OVERVIEW

GeerGarage is an outdoor gear sharing marketplace platform that quickly matches renters with lenders who have the right gear, available in the right place, at the right time. It is a circular, upstream business that expands reuse of outdoor gear through an easy-to-use app and offers a low-cost alternative to buying new gear, including a lease to own option. Positive impacts will include reductions in both landfill use and the environmental impact associated with the manufacture of new gear. It also makes outdoor recreation more accessible, exposing more people to the natural world. Elements explored throughout the cohort focused on marketing mentorship, pitch development, and partnership development, as the company positions itself for a venture capital raise.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Beta testing of platform with over 200 rentals transacted.
 - Better understanding the GeerGarage customer base and audience.
 - Developing a go-to-market strategy.
 - Perfecting a pitch with the NextCycle Washington coaches and mentors.
 - Developing connections with partners, grant funders and potential investors.
-

IMPACTS

- Created one full time job and seven part time positions to date.
 - Transacted 200 rentals to date, equivalent to over \$100,000 worth of gear that would have otherwise been purchased and left seldom used.
 - Projecting 560,000 rentals in five years, equivalent to \$280 million in equipment purchases.
- 

Birch Biosciences




OVERVIEW

Birch Biosciences brings biotech into the circular economy. The startup has developed a recycling approach for plastic using enzymes to depolymerize plastic, starting with PET and Polyurethane. Enzymes act as molecular scissors to break down plastics into their building blocks, where they can be recycled into virgin quality resin inputs for food grade packaging and other applications. They have proven the concept at a bench scale and are looking to develop a pilot demonstration plant in the Pacific Northwest before scaling up to commercial scale. Elements explored throughout the cohort focused primarily on improving understanding of the plastic recycling industry and connecting to potential material suppliers to test real world substrates.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Refine plastic recycling industry knowledge.
- Understand operating costs for various stages in the recycling process.
- Improve answers and arguments for product market fit, when speaking with investors and potential partners.
- Acquire samples of a range of representative substrates.

IMPACTS

- Raised \$5.5 million through grants and venture capital, will be seeking Series A fundraise in 2024.
 - Created seven jobs to date and expects to grow to 14 living wage jobs within a year.
 - Expects to support 150 living wage jobs within five years.
 - Expects to divert 10,000 pounds of PET and 1,000 pounds of Polyurethane in the first year of Pilot operations.
 - Within five years expects to divert 25,000 tons of PET and 2,000 tons of Polyurethane annually
- 

Data and Research

NextCycle Washington is a data driven program and has produced the following reports to deepen understanding of the landscape for circularity in Washington, while identifying gaps and opportunities for growing the movement. These resources are recommended for anyone wanting to learn more, and especially for social entrepreneurs looking for opportunities to take action to drive the greatest positive impact.

Circular Infrastructure Gap Analysis

NextCycle conducted a Circular Infrastructure Gap Analysis to identify and prioritize system needs and forecast possible outcomes of targeted interventions and investments. Improved understanding of these gaps and opportunities allows for a more targeted approach to the development of businesses and projects and can help drive smarter investment in the system.

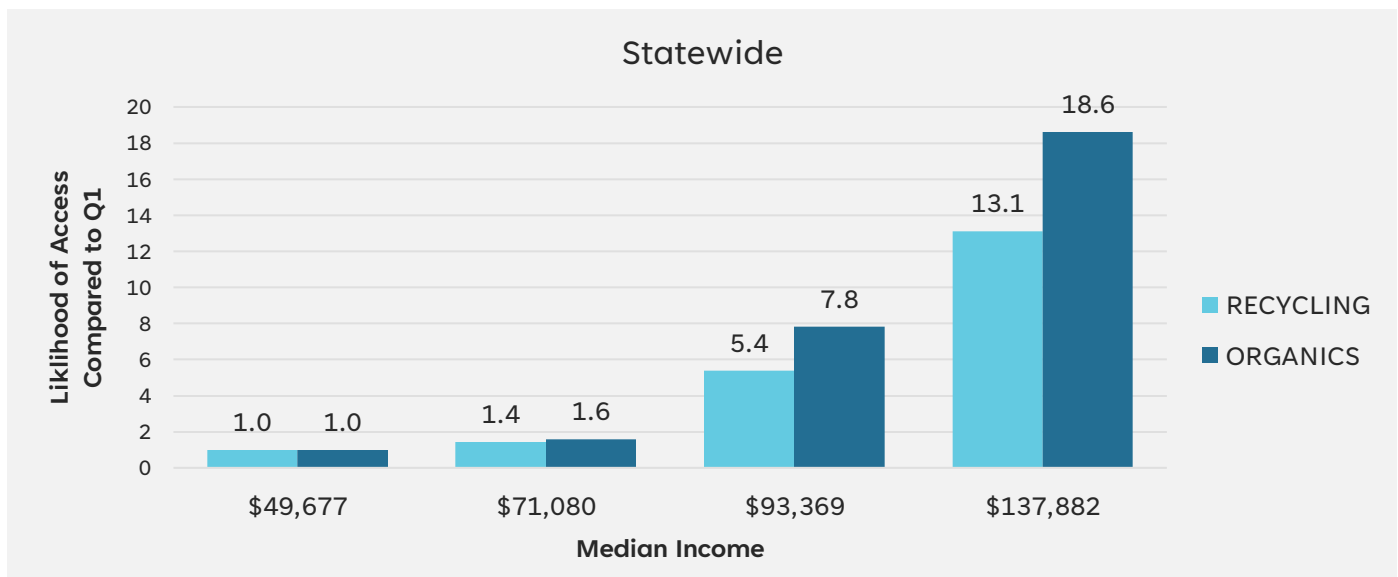


Figure 14. Access to recovery services by tract median income

Some highlights of the report include the finding that 84% of materials going into Washington’s landfills have known recovery pathways. Through modeling it is projected that nearly 1.9 million tons of these materials can be source reduced, prevented, reused, or recycled through interventions that exist today. This could lead to 75,000 direct, indirect, and induced jobs if all the material is reused, processed and/or remanufactured into new products within the state.

The report identified that high income census tracts are 13 times more likely to have recycling service and 18 times more likely to have organic recovery options than low-income tracts. While low-income tracts are three times more likely to host a landfill and 2.5 times more likely to host a material recovery facility or organic processing facility. Providing more upstream and downstream services in low-income tracts is a clear opportunity to divert more material, while creating economic opportunities in those communities.

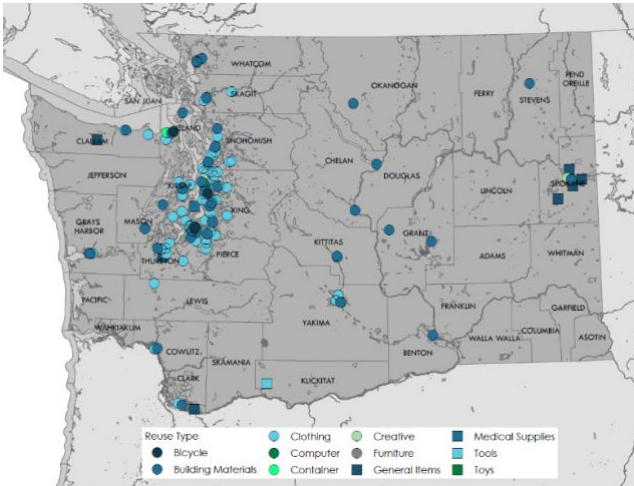


Figure 16. Reuse facilities

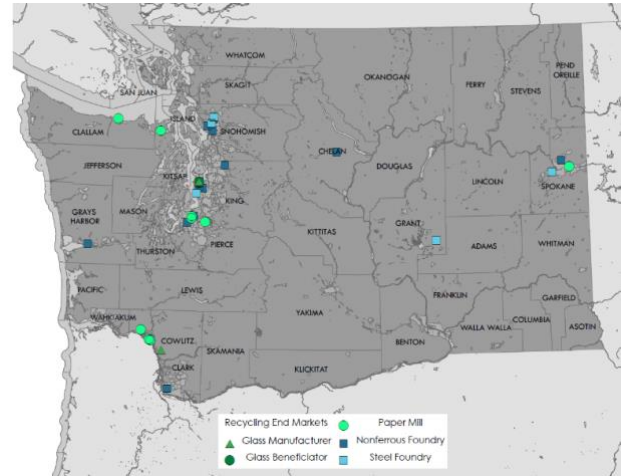


Figure 15. Recycling end markets

The report includes maps of reuse, recycling, and organic recovery infrastructure, including Figure 15, Figure 16 and many more. The full report can be downloaded at nextcyclewashington.com/resources.

Circular Funding Guide

An important aspect of the NextCycle Washington program is connecting participants to sources of funding that can propel them to the next stage of growth. To support this goal NextCycle Washington staff developed a guide to help entrepreneurs and organizational leaders understand the spectrum of funding opportunities available, choose an approach suited to their mission, stage of development, and focus, and prepare them for successful funding pitches and applications.

The guide includes basic descriptions of common funding types, some tips for success, and a set of profiles of funders engaged in **mission-based investing** – or investment deployed to target a specific goal – that aligns with the goals and principles of NextCycle Washington and its participants, who are focused on circular economy, social equity, and climate action.

Figure 17 is an example profile developed for this guide. The full report can be downloaded at nextcyclewashington.com/resources.

Elemental Excelerator

elementalexcelerator.com

Who Should Apply

Early-stage start ups focusing in one of the impact areas.

On average, Strategy Track companies have \$164,000 annual revenue, 6 full time employees, and have raised \$2.8 million.

On average, Project Track companies have \$1.1 million annual revenue, 19 full time employees, and have raised \$12.8 million.

About

Elemental Excelerator brings more than a decade of experience across the climate sector, with an active and maturing portfolio of more than 150+ companies. Elemental fills two gaps fundamental to addressing climate change: funding projects for climate technologies in communities and embedding equity and access into climate solutions. They invest in transformative technologies to create a system change for a more resilient, equitable future.

Contact

<https://elementalexcelerator.com/get-in-touch/>

Relevant Funding Details

- Strategy Track: \$350,000 in funding and coaching focused on core growth strategy including market intelligence, sales and growth, operational scale-up, equity and access, messaging, fundraising and policy.
- Project Track: \$1 million in funding and tailored support, including expert coaching, to deploy a transformational commercial project in any global market (a majority of projects funded in the U.S.)
- Follow-on funding may be provided based on the market conditions.
- Funding is typically in the form of a simple agreement of future equity (SAFE) or convertible notes.

Examples from Portfolio

- **EVBNU** – cotton textile fiber recycling
- **Novolooop** – upcycling plastic waste for high performance materials
- **Full Circle Bioplastics** – producing bioplastic polymers using food waste

Additional Resources

Elemental Excelerator is a program that combines funding and in-depth support through a 9-to-16-month cohort experience. Each year Elemental selects 15-20 companies to participate. There have been 12 cohorts to date. Activities include workshop modules and office hours. There is an application process and cohorts are selected based on a set criteria. Register on their website for updates to learn when the next application period will open.

Source: Website accessed May 2023; Interview May 2023

FOCUS INVESTMENT AREAS

Racial Equity & Environmental Justice

Circular Economy

Food and Agriculture

Climate / Clean Tech

Community Development

FUNDING INSTRUMENT
Equity

STAGE
Seed/Startup

IMPACT SPECTRUM
Emissions
DEI

IMPACT SPECTRUM
Impact Investing

Figure 17. Funder profile example

Circular Resilience Networks

NextCycle Washington’s *Systemic Risk, Resilience, and Circular Economy* [research and map](#) is built from discoveries in NextCycle Washington co-design priorities and the People’s Economy Lab’s [just transition mapping](#) sessions. This research is aimed at elevating and acknowledging work already being done through community-focused circular economy and resilience initiatives. Additionally, this research shows the connection between the circular economy and resilience to the *Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map* and spotlights areas where funding, investment, and technical assistance is being directed and where it is needed.

These interactive maps, such as Figure 18, show the systemic risk and threats to resilience that overburdened communities face and how communities are strengthening their resilience through building stronger, local circular economies that share, care for, repair and reuse materials locally.

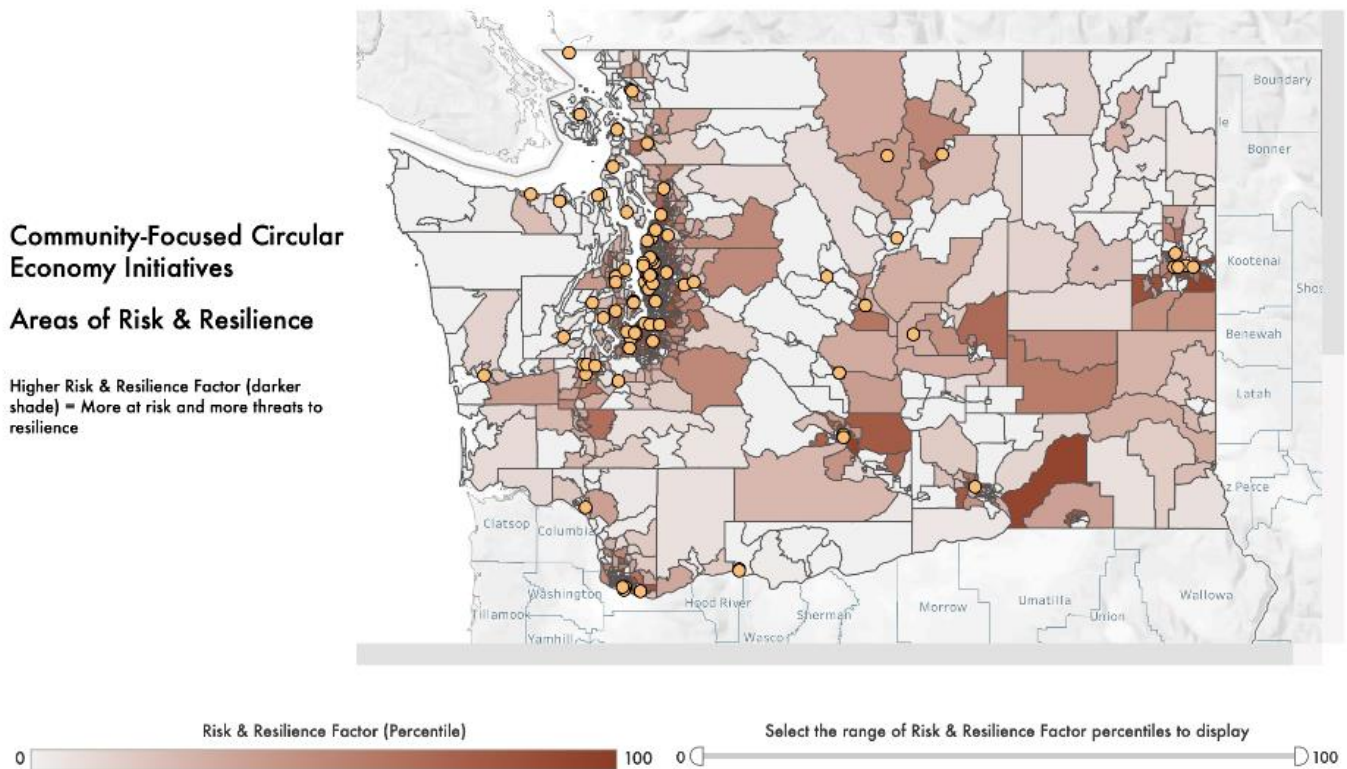


Figure 18. Screenshot of interactive Circular Resiliency Initiative Map

Communication, Engagement, and Recruitment

Communication and outreach efforts were critical elements in building program awareness, recruiting team participants and sponsors, and landing earned media opportunities to build awareness and momentum for this work. Although the program built upon the established NextCycle brand (seen in Colorado and Michigan), developing the NextCycle Washington brand, a veritable unknown in the state of Washington, required extensive effort through multiple channels.

Tools were developed for mass outreach and engagement including a dedicated website, social media platform, mass email/e-newsletter, webinars, videos, and conference participation including speaking opportunities and exhibit/table displays. Efforts were also made to engage media through press releases and article placement, landing 20 articles across 13 publications between February 2022 and June 2023. Visit the [NextCycle Washington news webpage](#) to review news and media coverage.

- Website:** A dedicated website was created at [NextCycleWashington.com](#). Input was received from the co-design committee during the initial website build and from various stakeholders throughout the program duration. This input informed modifications and additions of information to make language more accessible, improve user experience, and better communicate the program to all audiences. The website drew an average of 603 unique visitors each month, with the top month (October 2022) hitting 1,414 unique visitors. Average unique visitors increased 22% year-over-year, with spikes of 119% increase in average monthly unique visitors during months in which NextCycle Washington hosted events. Top traffic sources included direct (typing in the URL) and search engine. Referrals from several key websites helped to drive traffic as well (see side bar). Top webpages included: Home, Renew Seed Grant, Circular Accelerator, Apply, Teams, and Governance.
- Social Media:** A LinkedIn showcase page was created for [NextCycle Washington](#), building a followership of over 300 from January 2022 through May 2023 with top months of adoption related to the Seed Grant application period and the Pitch Showcase event. Top social media posts centered around Pitch Showcase event and content.
- Mass Email/E-newsletter:** Utilizing a mailing list built from webform submission, webinar and application party registrants, and networking contacts, a mass email was sent out approximately once per month. The mailing list contained an average of 215 contacts and achieved an average open rate of 39% and average click through rate of 7%, versus non-profit industry averages of 25%-39% and 1.6%-2.8%, respectively. Open rates started out around 15%-23% from

Website Referral Sources

Inks.gd (211)
 Grantinterface.com (125)
 Go.greenbiz.com (120)
 Statics.teams.cdn.office.net (73)
 Kingcounty.gov (68)
 Precyclewa.org (66)
 Ecology.wa.gov (62)
 Piercecountywa.gov (51)
 Ezview.wa.gov (42)
 Recycle.com (36)
 Greenbiz.com (35)
 Resource-recycling.com (30)
 Hylo.com (22)
 Seattle.gov (17)
 App.mobilize.io (15)
 Communities-rise.org (13)
 Peopleseconomylab.org (13)
 Grantsforum.io (12)
 Spokanezerowaste.org (12)
 Kamalpatel.co (11)
 Sustainability.uw.edu (11)
 Seattle.webex.com (10)
 Clarkgreenneighbors.org (8)
 Coopartnershps.org (8)
 Geekwire.com (8)
 Us06st1.zoom.us (8)
 Spokanevalleyed.org (7)
 Trello.com (6)

**Number in parentheses is the number of visitors from that source during January 2022 – May 2023.*

Figure 19. Website referral services

early emails that introduced the program concept and asked for participation in the “big circle” and “governance” teams. Open rates jumped to an average of 39% during the Circular Accelerator open application period. The highest open rate of 73% was focused on Pitch Showcase registration.

- **Videos:** The program created a dedicated [NextCycle Washington YouTube channel](#) to house all videos created by the program including webinar recordings, team pitches, and event recaps. The channel was also utilized to store recordings of non-public team and committee virtual meetings. These meeting recordings were not listed publicly on the channel but provided easy accessibility to team and committee participants. The top video is the [Pitch Showcase event recap](#) at 207 views (as of June 21, 2023).
- **Events:** Through a combination of NextCycle Washington-hosted online events and appearing at outside organization-hosted conferences, representatives were able to convey the purpose of the program and recruit teams and sponsors. Events included:
 - Washington State Recycling Association Conference (May 2022)
 - Circular Accelerator Launch Webinar (June 2022)
 - Washington Economic Development Association Conference (August 2022)
 - Renew Seed Grant Launch Webinar (September 2022)
 - Association of Oregon Recyclers Webinar (October 2022)
 - Application Party #1 (October 2022)
 - Application Party #2 (November 2022)
 - Pitch Showcase (March 2023)
 - Washington State Recycling Association Conference (May 2023)
 - Circular Innovation Summit (May 2023)
 - Circularity 23 (June 2023)

Individual outreach enabled program representatives to engage with potential teams, sponsors, and trusted messengers in a more personal, one-to-one setting. Tools were developed for this more individualized approach including flyers, business cards, virtual office hours, and two application parties. The application parties were unique opportunities for potential teams to join an online meeting where virtual breakout rooms focused on several aspects of the program, allowing individuals to ask questions of program facilitators, breaking down barriers and clarifying the pathway to submitting a team application.

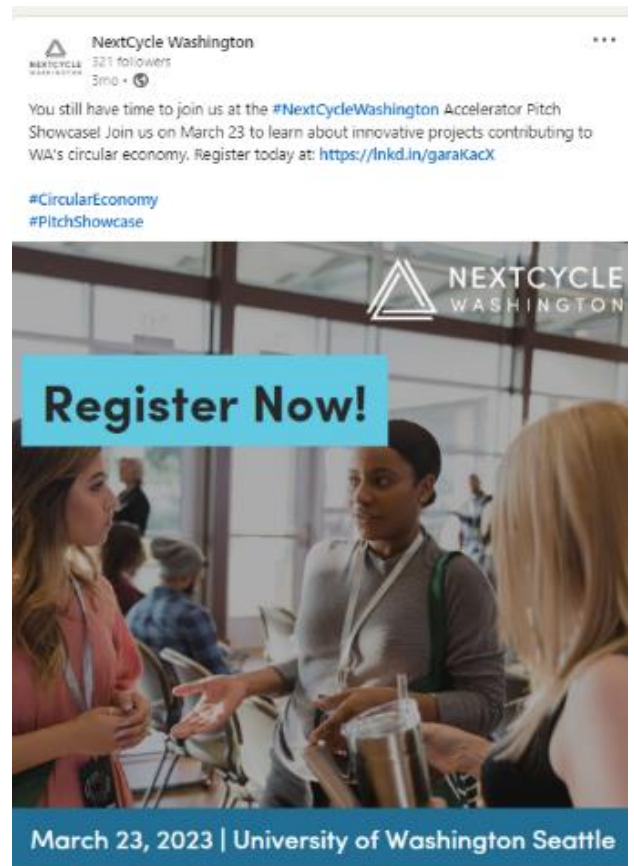


Figure 20. NextCycle Washington Accelerator Pitch Showcase social media post

The NextCycle Washington team shared some of these communication and engagement tools outside of the dedicated representatives with applicant mentors and trusted messengers. Trusted messengers are organizations and individuals that spread the word about the program to their networks through social media posts, shared e-newsletters, and other shared content. Building an ambassador group enabled messaging to go beyond traditional media and the program’s established network (i.e., social media and mailing list), expanding awareness and engagement to as many people, communities, and organizations as possible.

The NextCycle Washington program established a brand and completed a cohort. Communications for the next cohort will be able to draw on lessons learned and alumni team stories to build on that brand, generate greater awareness, and create strong recruitment messages.

Accelerating the Circular Economy in Washington State

NextCycle Washington is a statewide circular economy accelerator program. By nurturing projects that incorporate waste prevention, repair, reuse, recycling and organic recovery, NextCycle Washington helps reduce waste, keeps materials in use longer, and regenerates natural systems, while developing equitable local economies.

Program Details
There are two ways to participate in NextCycle Washington:

- Circular Accelerator**
The Circular Accelerator consists of two competitive challenges designed to identify and support promising circular businesses and projects. Upstream projects focus on preventing waste or improving the reuse and recylt market in Washington state. Downstream projects focus on improving and innovating recycling, recovery, and end uses of materials.
PROGRAM BENEFITS:
• Business and technical planning support • Pitch development • Funding pathways
- Renew Seed Grant**
The Renew Seed Grant program is a starting point for incubating a new innovative business or project.
PROGRAM BENEFITS:
• Small grants up to \$10K • Technical support and growth planning • Established networking and matchmaking

Which program is right for me?

Business Stage	Definition	Renew Seed Grant	Circular Accelerator
Research	Marketplace study, material audits, laboratory testing, etc.	•	
Pilot	Testing an idea, a product, or service in a finite marketplace.	•	•
Early Growth	Implementing an idea, product, or service.	•	•
Scaling	Increasing market share and customer base.		•
Pivot	Established business entering new a product or service area.		•
Expansion	Established business expanding reach and/or offering.		•

NextCycle Washington is an initiative of:

- State of Washington
- King County
- Seattle Public Utilities
- GreenSource

More information on program details, eligibility, and deadlines can be found at NextCycleWashington.com

SCAN ME FOR MORE INFO

Figure 21. NextCycle Washington promotional flyer

Vision for the Future

NextCycle Washington considers its first year a resounding success. We were able to support incredible businesses and organizations, while increasing awareness of the benefits for the circular economy for diverting waste while creating equitable access and opportunities for overburdened and underrepresented communities. The NextCycle brand gained broad recognition through self-produced events and content in addition to broad inclusion in external events and publications. NextCycle Washington even got a call out from Governor Jay Inslee during a keynote at the international GreenBiz Circularity23 conference, which had over 1,400 attendees from all over the world!

At the same time, we see many opportunities to expand the impact of this work. In the coming year NextCycle Washington hopes to accomplish the following:

- Continue supporting businesses and organizations representing upstream and downstream circular interventions.
- Extend our reach to support underrepresented demographics such as Black and Indigenous leaders.
- Extend our reach to support more teams from rural parts of the state that lack services and infrastructure.
- Lower more barriers to entry by facilitating application writing support and possibly offering alternative application formats.
- Enable more partnerships among participants to build out emerging circular supply chains and create peer to peer support networks.
- Grow our partnership network to include more community partners and funding partners.
- Enable more early engagement of community partners and funding partners with teams in the next cohort.
- Bring in more public and private funding to host events to build a stronger community among NextCycle Washington staff, funders, teams, partners, and other emerging leaders.
- Bring in more public private funding to support the program through innovative new ideas such as a sponsored track or sponsoring additional teams to expand the number of teams that we can impact.
- Bring in more public and private funding to allow for direct grant distribution.
- Connect teams with more external public and private funding to increase their impact.
- Conduct more research that can help guide strategic decisions for the program and entrepreneurs.