



WHAT YOU SAID Report

Circular Economy Engagement



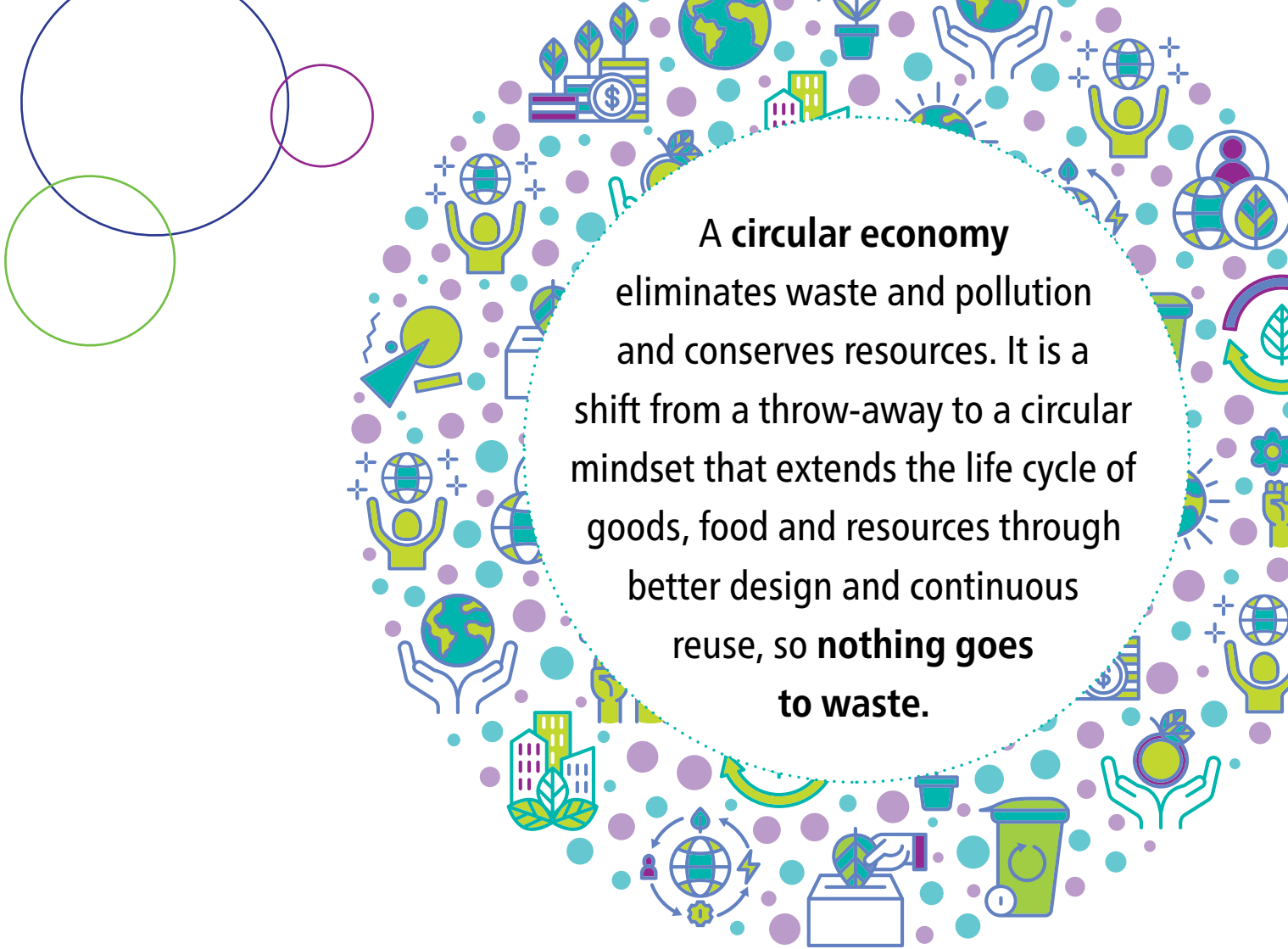
Waste Management
york.ca/Waste


York Region



Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that York Region is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples and the treaty territories of the Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Williams Treaties First Nations. Today this area is home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, and we recognize their history, spirituality, culture and stewardship of this land. We also acknowledge the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation as our closest First Nation community.



Background

The Regional Municipality of York is a leader in waste diversion, developing innovative programs to engage the community in waste prevention. Since 2014, York Region, with its local cities and towns, and community partners have implemented:

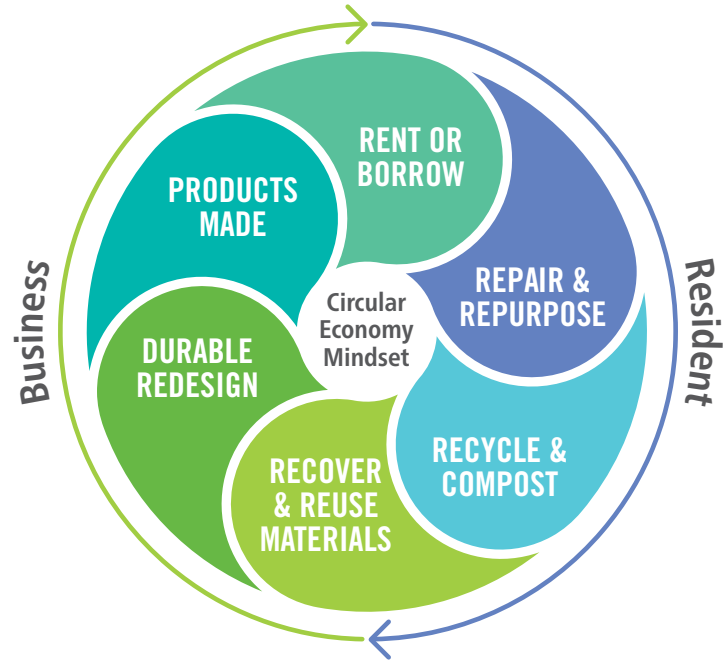
- Repair Cafés, Curbside Giveaway Days and four Lendery locations offering residents an opportunity to repair and reuse items keeping them in use longer
- The Circular Economy Initiatives Fund supporting local non-profits and charities who reduce waste and accelerate the circular economy in the Region
- Textile recycling bins at municipal and multi-residential sites across the Region
- The Good Food Program encouraging residents to reduce avoidable food waste and improve their health

It’s time to focus on the circular economy and lead by example, inspiring and empowering our communities to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, address social needs such as food security and create resiliency and jobs by rethinking how we design, use and manage resources, including waste.

Purpose

The goal of this work was to learn what York Region residents and businesses know about the circular economy, hear what actions they are currently doing and what they would like to see in the future.

In turn, residents and businesses were able to learn more about the circular economy, its benefits and how small actions can contribute to overall change.



Circular Economy Working Group

York Region established the Circular Economy Working Group (CEWG) in 2022. Volunteer members from local businesses, community groups and academia who have circular economy knowledge and experience came together to:

- Contribute to the development of a baseline inventory of circular economy resources in York Region
- Create circular economy resources for residents and students
- Meet bi-monthly over the two-year term
- Provide expert advice and feedback to York Region’s circular economy programs, policies and plans
- Network, learn and collaborate with each other and Regional staff, to advance the circular economy within their own organizations and communities in York Region

The working group members for the 2022 to 2024 term included:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| • Anil Abrol, President & CEO, Eco Guardian Inc. | • Chaya Chengappa, Program Manager, Water Stewardship, Partners in Project Green | • Andrew Paton, Research Manager, Seneca Polytechnic |
| • Audrey Bayens, Marketing Manager, WeRCircular and Program Coordinator, Windfall Ecology Centre | • Tom Manimanakis, Independent Consultant | • Morgan Sage, Food Policy Coordinator, York Region Food Network |
| • Cesar Caneo, Executive Director, SERA Community Ventures Ltd. | • Ramu Narayanan, Writer, Blue Dot York Region | • Taylor Stanley, Sustainability Specialist, Riverside Natural Foods |

Engagement work presented in this report was a direct result of this working group and was supported by York Region and Kennedy Consulting Ltd.

Engagement summary

This report summarizes thoughts and opinions gathered through York Region’s engagement activities to support growth and development of circular economy initiatives.

From October 2023 to July 2024, York Region hosted:

- A webinar for residents with an idea wall
- A survey for residents
- A survey for businesses in York Region and/or those that serve York Region customers
- An engagement activity at six community events

Engagement opportunities were promoted through the following communication channels:

- Community events
- Mobile road signs
- Networking through Circular Economy Working Group Members
- Newspaper ads
- Public consultation page at york.ca/CircularMovement
- Social media

Resident webinar

In October 2023, York Region held an online webinar to gather feedback about residents’ knowledge of circular economy programs and practices. The webinar included:

- Background information about the circular economy and what York Region is doing
- Community ambassador presentations by:
 - Jennifer Williamson, educator and creator of the Aurora-Newmarket: pass it on Facebook group
 - Kristen Hosick, small business owner, former CEWG member
- Interactive idea-gathering activity (idea wall)
- Waste reduction tips
- Survey promotion
- Questions and answers
- Next steps



Idea wall

Participants of the webinar were asked to share information about circular economy initiatives they were aware of or ones they would like to see. The following are some ideas that were shared:

- Existing programs and initiatives

 - Car donation programs where they repair and resell them
 - Circular Marketplace that lists circular businesses
 - Coats for Kids (and adults) accepts coats for those in need
 - Little free libraries – small libraries hosted by homeowners on their lawns
 - Refilleries where you can get your favourite cleaning products without all the packaging
 - Urban farm at Durham College to teach food literacy and grow food for food banks
- Future ideas

 - Better management of construction materials, rules for contractors on management of wood, windows, lighting, flooring and furniture and make reuse more accessible
 - Circular economy certification program to recognize and reward businesses
 - Community swap events
 - Green burial options
 - Halloween costume exchanges
 - Sports equipment swaps or rentals
- Programs around the world

 - Automated large-scale textile sorting plant in Sweden sorts and recycles items into new materials, sorting fabrics with infrared technology by fibre type and colour
 - Recycling of low-value plastics into park benches in Exter, United Kingdom
 - Shoe company in Georgia, United States, makes shoes from recycled content and soy-based products
 - Sports equipment lending program in Banff, Alberta



The webinar ran for just over one hour and had approximately 23 participants at any given time. A recording of the webinar is available at york.ca/CircularEconomy under the Community Engagement section.

Resident and business online surveys

Surveys had a combined total of 140 responses. The resident survey had 123 responses. The business survey had 27 responses.

Feedback collected from these engagement initiatives will help York Region plan for future programs and services to support a circular economy in York Region.

Key findings

Residents

It is clear through our webinar, survey and outreach at events that York Region residents are not very familiar with the term “circular economy”. The following are some of the key findings from these activities:

- Over half of respondents (56%) indicated they know what the term “circular economy” meant
- When asked about current actions, many respondents (64%) indicated they are doing many of the identified circular actions and did not realize they were already contributing to a circular economy
- Respondents seem to be familiar with many of York Region’s programs, with only 9% not being aware of any
- The top three actions of respondents included: donating or selling unwanted items (78%), avoiding single-use items (56%) and borrowing from family and friends (51%)
- Several respondents (19%) indicated that more education is required to inform community members about available programs and actions
- Many are not sure or do not think circular economy services are widely available or accessible in York Region
- Respondents feel York Region needs to raise awareness to and create partnerships to share information more widely with the community
- There were many suggestions for additional programs
- Respondents are willing to learn more and help share existing programs and initiatives with family, friends and neighbours to benefit the environment and their children

Notes:

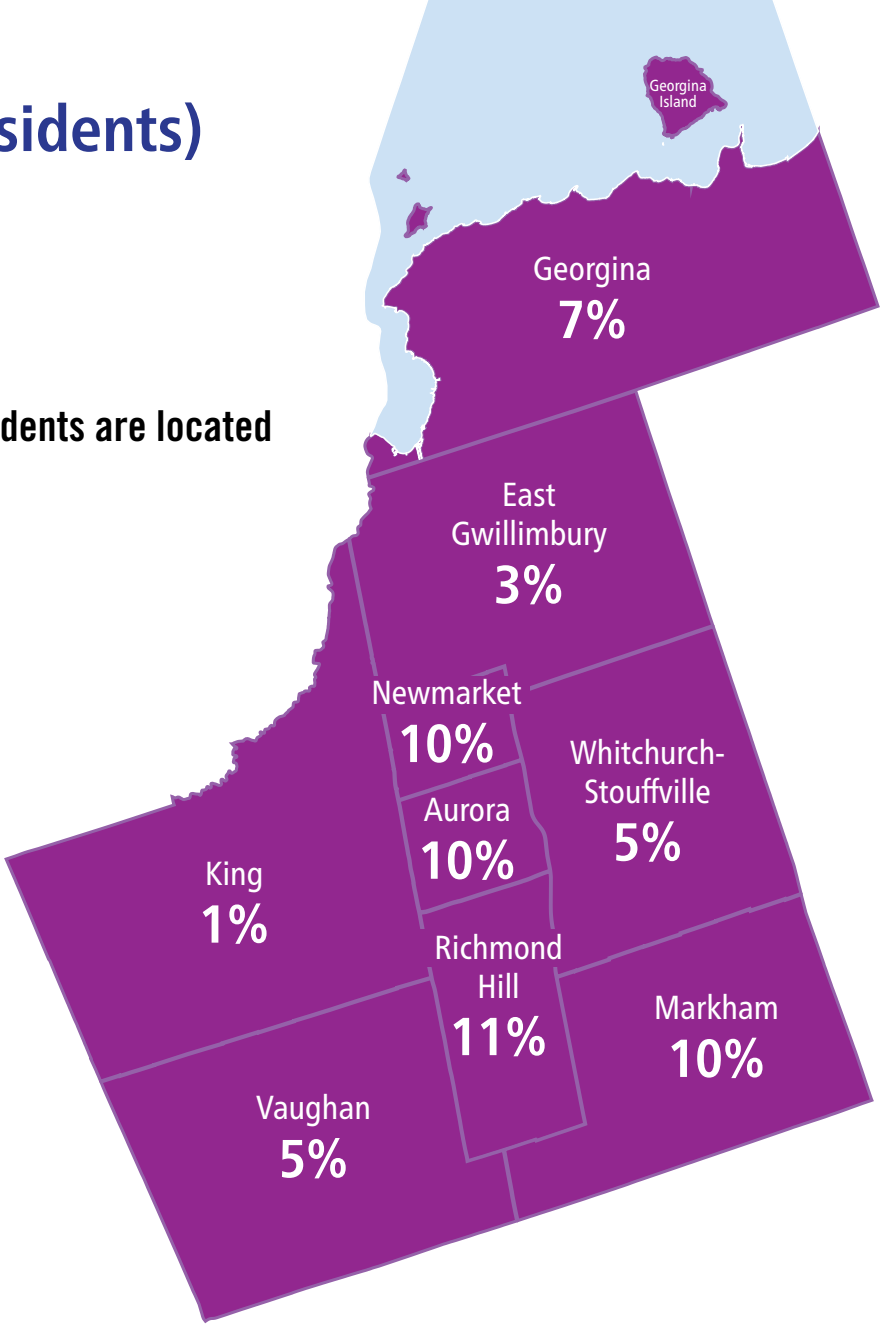
- **Rounding to the nearest whole number**
Results for some survey questions were rounded to the nearest whole number, (example; 33.33% is rounded to 33%). As a result, the percentage total for some questions may not add up to 100%.
- **Response percentages exceed 100%**
When questions allow survey respondents to select more than one response, the total number of responses for that question may be greater than the total number of survey respondents that answered the question. This may cause the total response percentages to exceed 100%.
- **Proportions below 1% are not shown in the graphs**
- **Open-ended responses may have been edited for clarity**



Who we heard from (residents)



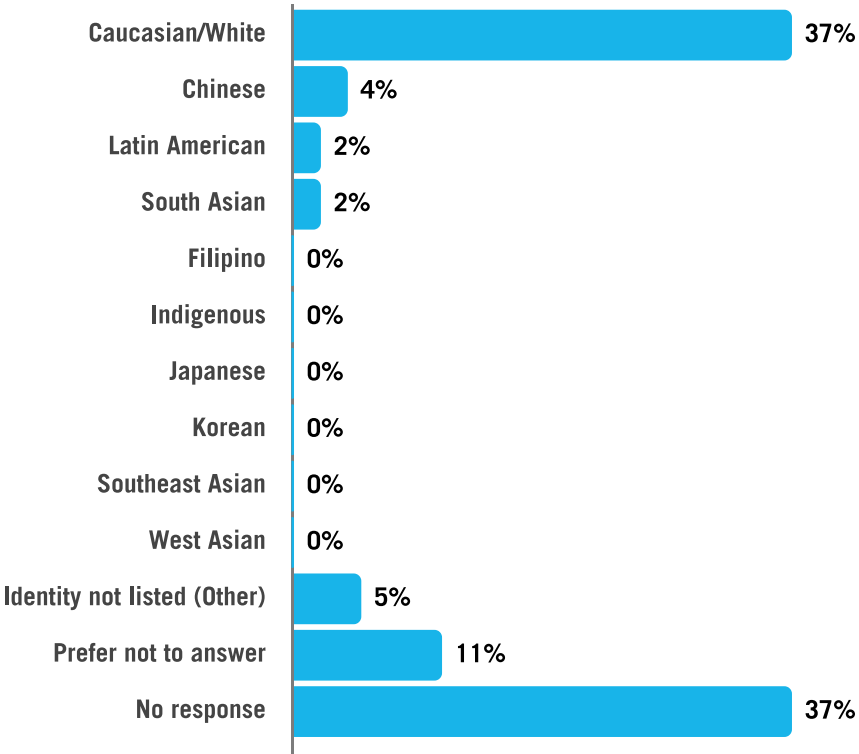
Where respondents are located



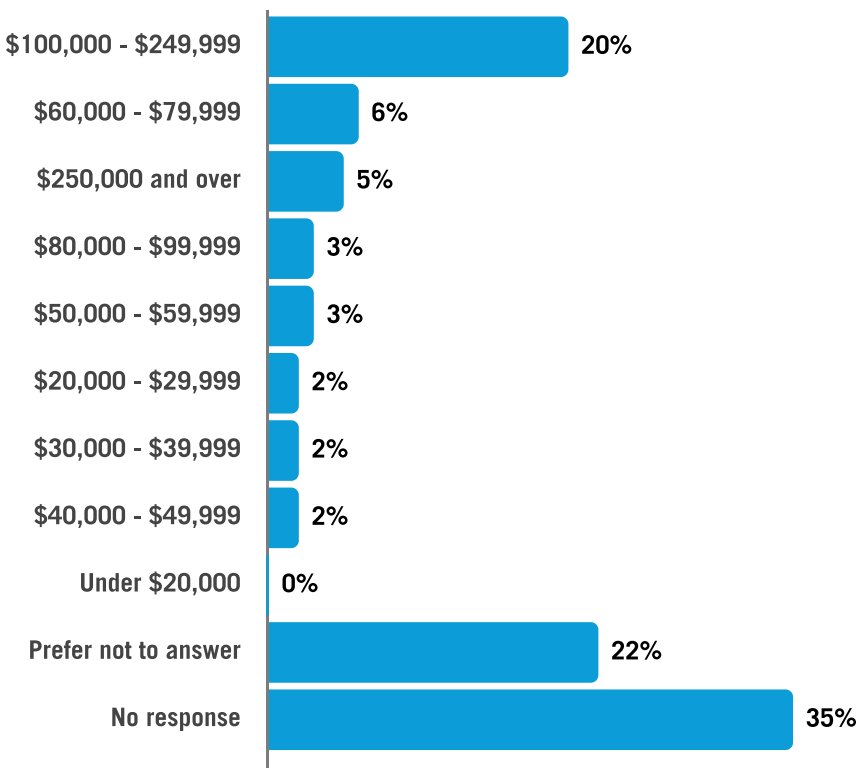
How respondents identify



How respondents describe themselves



Respondents' household income before taxes



Age of respondents

37%
35 to 64 years

18%
65+ years

3%
18 to 34 years

1%
17 and under

6%
Prefer not to answer

35%
No response



Who we heard from (residents)

Survey responses

What residents think the term "circular economy" means, sorted by theme:

- Donate, shop second-hand, pass-it-on, swap and share** 7%
- Keep moving items forward to others
 - Upcycling, reselling things I don't need, buying used items
- Minimize waste, no waste, waste reduction** 15%
- Reusing more and wasting less
 - No waste by utilizing all parts of the food and materials we use to survive
- Product re-design** 5%
- We should also consider reinventing or retooling at the manufacturer level, since often that is where the lifecycle of products can be most impactful
 - The environment is considered in all areas of the lifecycle of a product and/or service
- Recycle, reduce, refurbish, repair, repurpose, reuse, upcycling, resource reduction** 50%
- Reusing and repurposing goods to prevent them going to the landfill; to eliminate waste
 - Using pre-owned items instead of buying new
- Other** 10%
- Avoiding end use products and packaging in so far as is possible; only buying what I need and using what I buy
 - Sustainability
- Not sure** 3%
- No response** 27%



Are you familiar with the term "circular economy"?

56%
Yes

28%
No

16%
Not sure



"To me it means sustainability, as nothing is wasted and the reuse of items is considered as much as the creation of them. Energy production is renewable and environmentally friendly. Everything can be repaired or made into something else. There is no longer such a thing as planned obsolescence."



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\$35 each

While supplies last.
Price includes home delivery and tax.

ORDER ONLINE BY MAY 12

york.ca/Compost

For more information about this program, scan the QR code or call 1-877-464-9675.

CURBSIDE GIVEAWAY

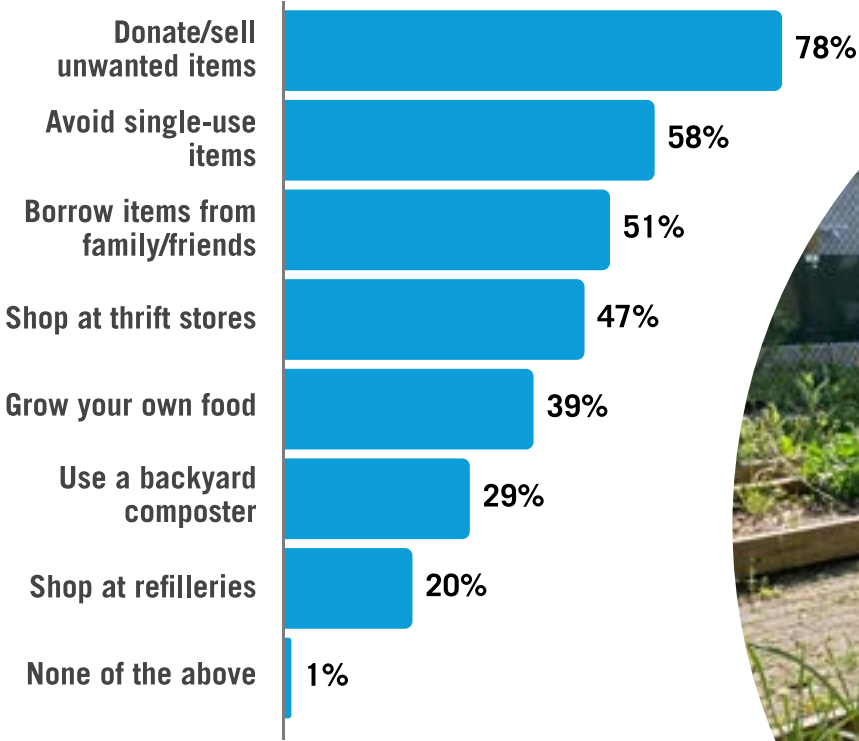
#YRCURBALERT

REPAIR cafe

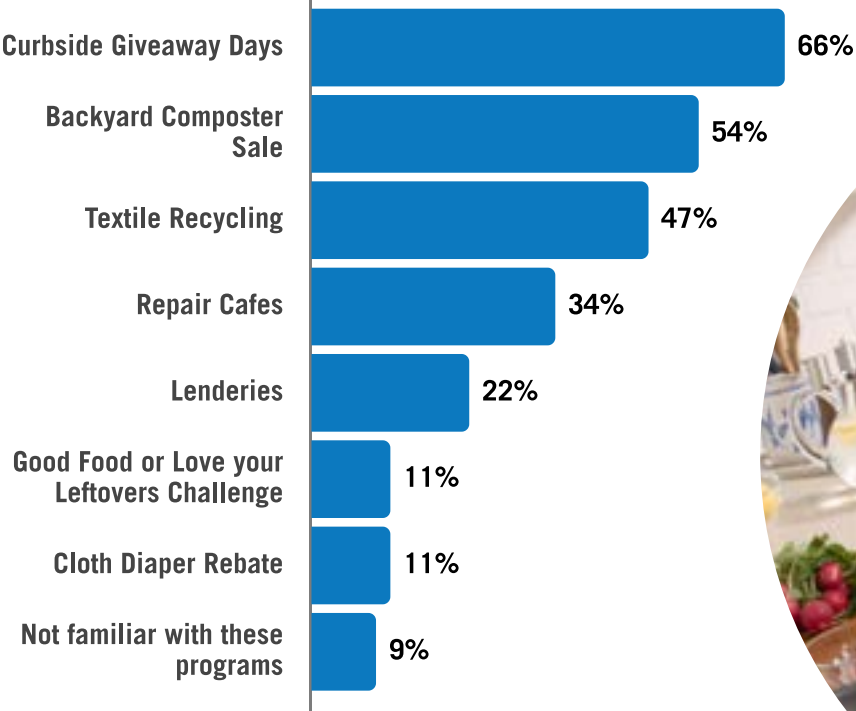
GO AHEAD...

Make someone's day!

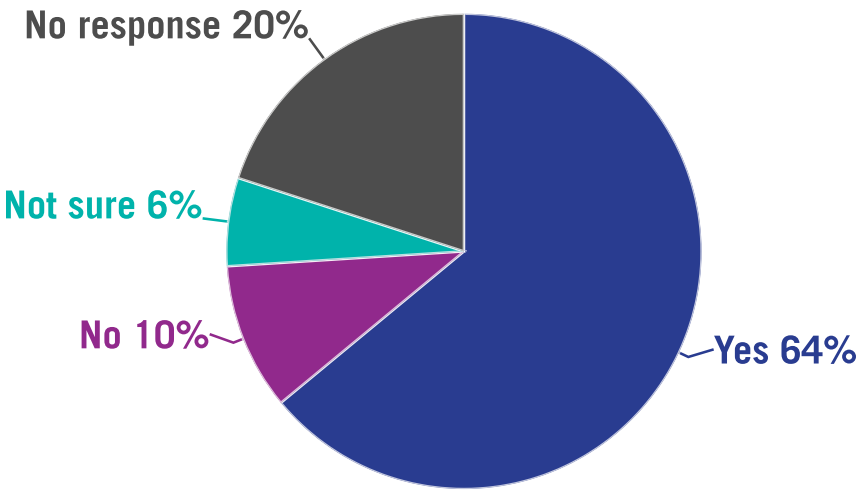
Do you do any of the following actions?



Are you familiar with any of the following circular economy initiatives in York Region?

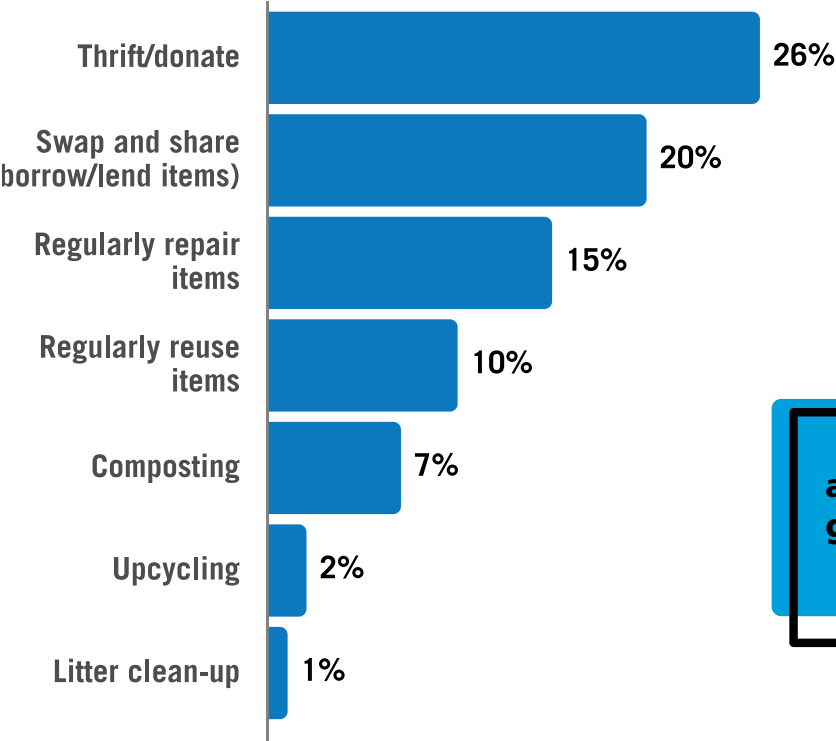


Have you personally participated in any circular economy activities or practices (such as reusing, repairing, sharing)?



Describe your involvement and tell us why you participate in these initiatives

How you are involved in circular initiatives:

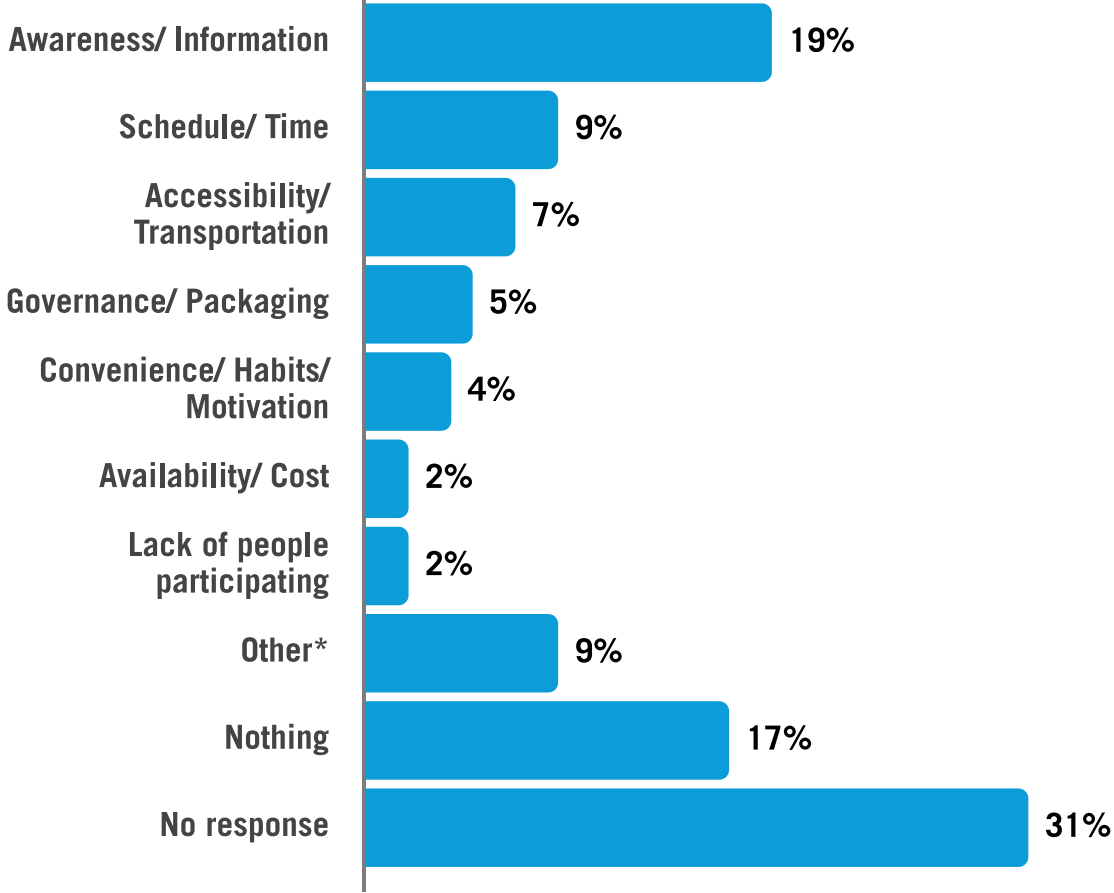


A sample of "why" you participate in these initiatives*



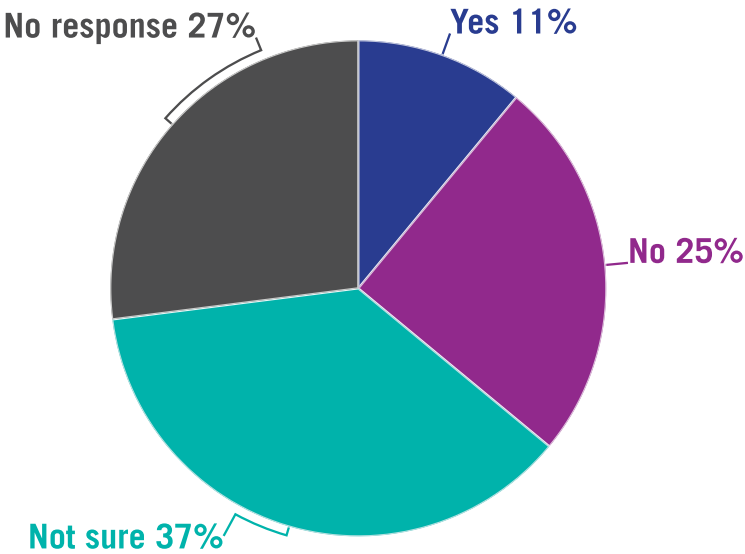
*Comments may have been edited for clarity

What stops you from participating in circular economy practices?

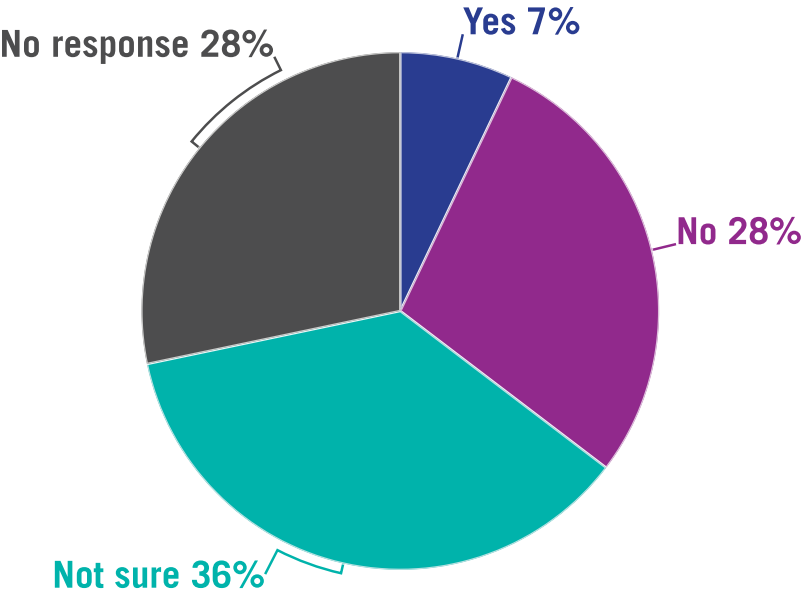


*Other responses included; have everything I need, limited participation, local bylaws around curbside giveaways, not everything is available for sharing or can be shared, space

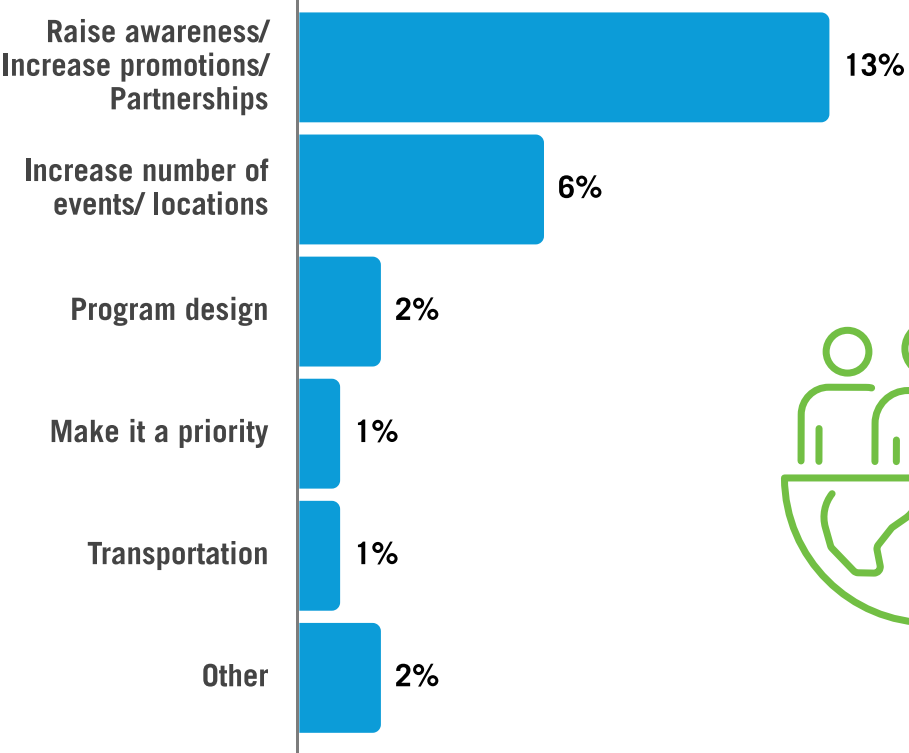
Do you feel circular economy services and resources are widely available in York Region?



Do you feel circular economy services and resources are widely accessible in York Region?



Your recommendations on how to make circular economy programs and resources more accessible, sorted by theme



Not all respondents provided an answer to this question; some responses may contain multiple themes

Your suggestions on how to make circular programs more accessible

- "A reuse centre that allows people to donate and reuse"
- "Access is key. If I have to drive from Stouffville to Newmarket/Aurora then am I really making the impact I hope too?"
- "Better and easily accessible education. Connect with community businesses"
- "Hubs in each community for repairs and lending, coordination between various services so they can be accessed at once"
- "More ads and marketing, posters everywhere as reminders for people. More activities. Keep businesses and organizations engaged."
- "More signage, more frequency, more locations that are closer/easier to get to (community centres, the mall)"
- "Promote much more heavily, lead by example, leaders should demonstrate true circular economy living"
- "Spreading the availability of the practice, and publicizing the why it's needed"
- "We should not have to drive to areas to recycle items. Once a month pickup would be far better"

**Comments may have been edited for clarity*



Are there specific circular economy actions or programs you would like to see created?



46%
Yes

21%
No

33%
No response



Who you told us these circular economy leaders are



Examples of ideas you shared*

Advocacy/Governance

"Completely eliminate single use packaging. Try to aim for total recycling"

"Laws about excessive packaging that are enforced both at retail and border level"

"Make companies deal with the end-life of the products they produce. It needs to be returned to and recycled by the original manufacturer"

"Rules-based initiatives that mean industry needs to fully participate in a circular economy...If corporations manufacture it, they are responsible for it through its lifespan"

Collection

"Have a fleet of "circular" trucks that can go through neighborhoods on a regular basis and collect circular economy items"

"Have regular collections for clothes, toys, kitchen plates/pots/glasses"

Community

"Community swap/market for gently used items (ex: town-level garage sale)"

"Create curbside Friday for businesses"

"Encouraging second hand furniture" or "a furniture depot"

"Food sharing/rescue program"

"Have York Region run thrift stores. People can bring in items to exchange for new items needed"

"I would put more out for curbside pick up (filing cabinets etc.) if I could lift them... having volunteers to assist moving heavier items might be a good program to initiate"

"Local websites that provide swapping and sharing"

"More fruit and vegetable gardens on public property for access to all"

"More stores to buy products by the fill you own container"

"Restaurants encouraged/helped to implement a take out container swap program"

Repair

"A reuse hub that provides a variety of goods along with repair services"

"Have appliance repair parts available to all who are handy, including homeowners"

"More repair cafes"

"Waste materials should be more available to the public to repair their older items"

Repurpose

"Workshops teaching people how to repurpose items or create from items no longer used"

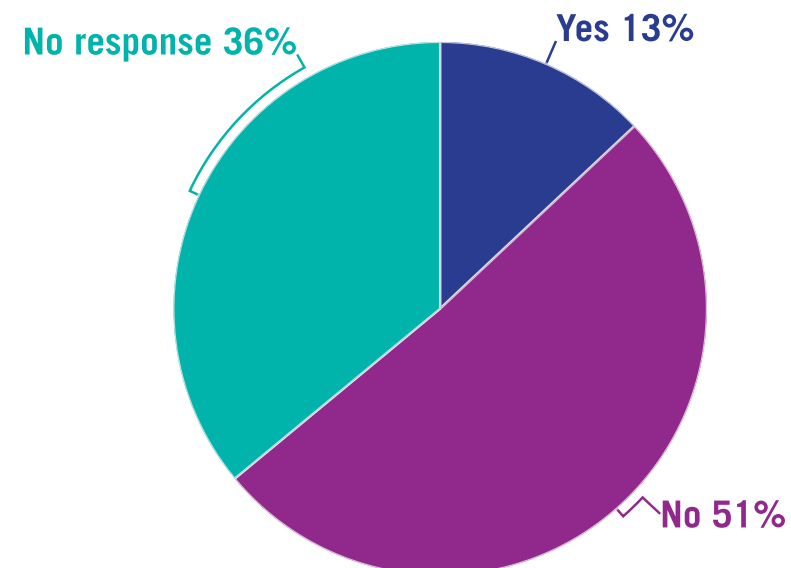
Do you know of any local or international organizations, businesses or community groups actively involved in promoting or implementing circular economy practices that York Region can learn from?

16%
Yes

52%
No

32%
No response

Is your workplace or business involved in the circular economy?



- Charities
- Clothing consignment stores
- Compost Council of Canada
- Dedicated individuals
- Downsizing services
- Environmental groups
- Food recovery apps
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hosts of clothing swaps
- Local furniture marketplaces
- Other Repair Cafés
- Refilleries
- Social media swap and share groups
- The Story of Stuff organization
- Thrift/second-hand stores

*Comments may have been edited for clarity

How you said you can help increase participation in and contribute to circular economy initiatives

Educate

- Advocate and share information through social media
- Do my research
- Educate myself and others
- Educated through schools
- Share information in community presentations, open houses
- Talk to neighbours and friends

Take action

- Bring own containers, buy in bulk, be intentional about purchases
- Consume only what we need
- Do our part once we learn about alternatives
- Explain to children how important it is
- Keep doing what we are doing
- Lead by example
- Participate in curbside giveaways days, donate items, share with family and friends
- Provide incentives or penalties
- Repair, don't waste
- Shop less
- Start doing more in our house
- Volunteer with organizations supporting circular economy initiatives



Community events

York Region attended various community events throughout 2023 and 2024 promoting the circular economy and asking attendees about their circular economy practices. While very few people knew what the term “circular economy” meant, many were already doing circular economy actions.

Participants used tokens to indicate their responses to the questions asked. Some questions changed slightly from event to event so results were reported individually.

Newmarket Home Show						
April 1, 2023						
Location:	Ray Twinney Community Centre					
Audience:	Various age groups					
Total participation:	94					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Unsure
Total	6	11	5	10	25	37
	6%	12%	5%	11%	27%	39%

Connecting with the Land						
May 30, 2023						
Location:	Milliken Mills High School					
Audience:	YOUTH - High School and Grade 8 Students					
Total participation:	164					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Total	5	29	40	28	19	43
	3%	18%	24%	17%	12%	26%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Avoid Single-Use Plastics	Borrow from Friends/Family	Donate/Sell Unwanted Items	Repurpose Items	Grow your own food	Shop at Thrift stores
Total	62	116	113	90	85	46
	38%	71%	69%	55%	52%	28%

Aurora Street Festival						
June 4, 2023						
Location:	Yonge St and Brookland Ave					
Audience:	Various age groups					
Total participation:	141					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Total	21	18	17	13	9	63
	15%	13%	12%	9%	6%	45%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Avoid Single-Use Items	Borrow from Friends/ Family	Donate/Sell Unwanted Items	Shop at Thrift stores	Grow your food	All of These
Total	51	75	91	57	47	30
	36%	53%	65%	40%	33%	21%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Recycle Textiles	Participate in Curbside Giveaway Days	Borrow Items from a Lendery	Attend a Repair Café	Use a Backyard Composter	Reduce your Food Waste
Total	77	47	22	11	34	87
	55%	33%	16%	8%	24%	62%



Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival						
July 1, 2023						
Location:	Stouffville Memorial Park					
Audience:	Various age groups					
Total participation:	38					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Total	7	4	4	2	7	14
	18%	11%	11%	5%	18%	37%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Avoid Single-Use Items	Borrow from Friends/ Family	Donate/Sell Unwanted Items	Shop at Thrift stores	Grow your food	All of These
Total	22	30	27	22	24	12
	58%	79%	71%	58%	63%	32%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Recycle Textiles	Participate in Curbside Giveaway Days	Borrow Items from a Lendery	Attend a Repair Café	Use a Backyard Composter	Reduce your Food Waste
Total	30	21	13	9	11	34
	79%	55%	34%	24%	29%	89%

Chippewas of Georgina Island Pow Wow						
September 24, 2023						
Location:	Sutton District High School					
Audience:	Various age groups					
Total participation:	31					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Total	4	10	2	1	4	10
	13%	32%	6%	3%	13%	32%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Avoid Single-Use Items	Borrow from Friends/Family	Donate/Sell Unwanted Items	Shop at Thrift stores	Grow your food	All of These
Total	13	14	18	14	11	14
	42%	45%	58%	45%	35%	45%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Recycle Textiles	Participate in Curbside Giveaway Days	Borrow Items from a Lendery	Attend a Repair Café	Use a Backyard Composter	Reduce your Food Waste
Total	19	14	7	2	12	24
	61%	45%	23%	6%	39%	77%



Markham Celebrates Earth Month						
April 20, 2024						
Location:	Downtown Markham					
Audience:	Various age groups					
Total participation:	110					
Statement: I know what a “Circular Economy” is						
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Total	0	9	1	99	0	1
	0%	8%	1%	90%	0%	1%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Avoid Single-Use Items	Borrow from Friends/Family	Donate/Sell Unwanted Items	Shop at Thrift stores	Grow your food	All of These
Total	79	100	110	60	85	28
	72%	91%	100%	55%	77%	25%

Daily Activities						
Activities	Recycle Textiles	Participate in Curbside Giveaway Days	Borrow Items from a Lendery	Attend a Repair Café	Use a Backyard Composter	Reduce your Food Waste
Total	88	25	26	3	39	83
	80%	23%	24%	3%	35%	75%



Engaging with businesses

The goal of the business engagement was to develop, publish, share and analyze a short survey aimed at identifying circular economy leaders among local businesses. This survey complements the resident survey and will help York Region:

- Find local businesses already engaging in circular practices
- Develop and refine future resources and activities to help promote local circular economy innovations and best practices (profiles, speakers for future workshops)

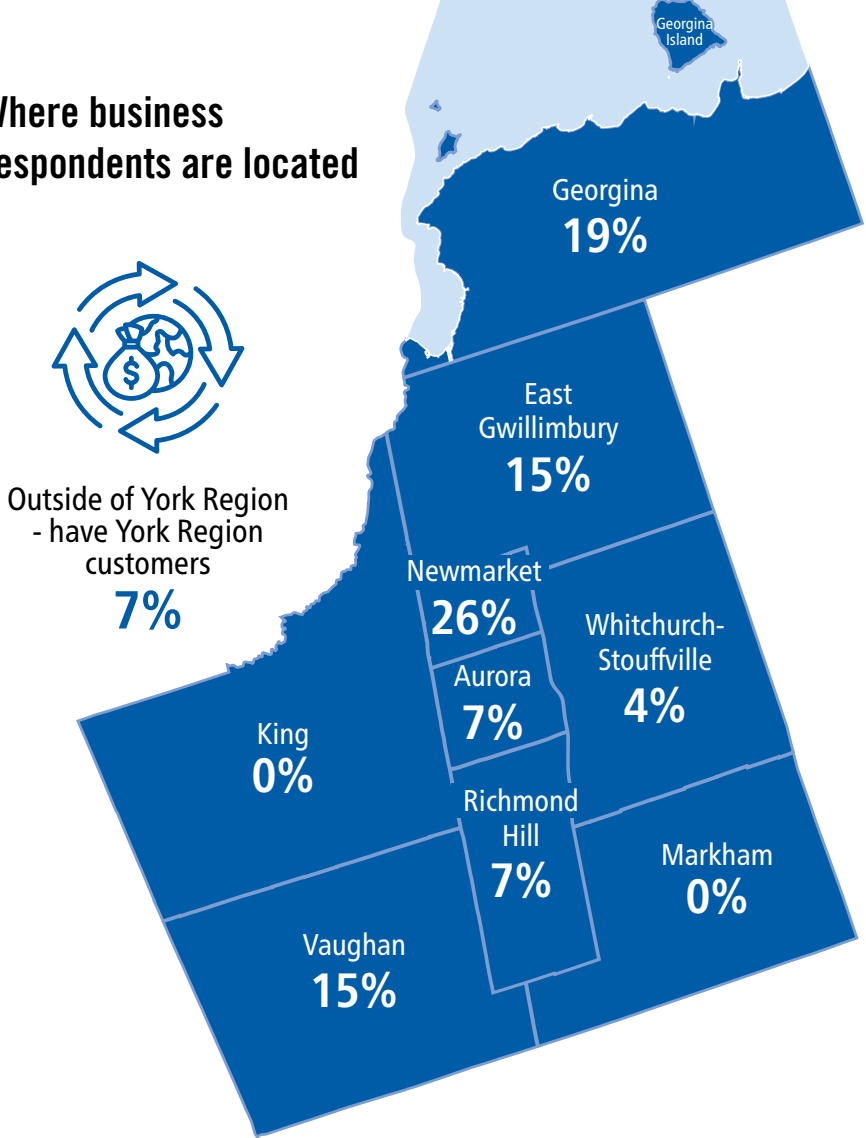
Key findings

Businesses

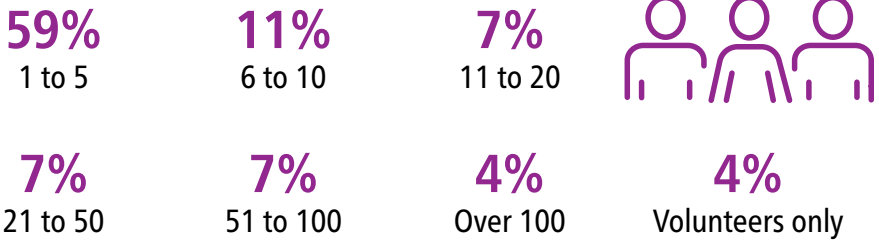
York Region heard from 27 businesses, across various service sectors, about their circular economy actions and initiatives. Organizations ranged from zero (volunteers only) employees to over 100. Some of the key findings from this survey include:

- About 75% of respondents considered themselves active in circular economy initiatives, in varying levels
- The majority (70%) of respondents indicated they would like to be more aware of what additional circular economy actions they can do, have more education and access to more resources
- Over half of respondents (52%) have already established a relationship with another organization to repurpose surplus materials
- About one third (37%) of respondents repurpose materials from another organization
- The largest successes, as a result of implementing circular economy actions include cost savings (59%) and progress towards sustainable goals (56%)
- The largest barriers to greater participation in circular economy initiatives are financial (44%) and awareness (22%)

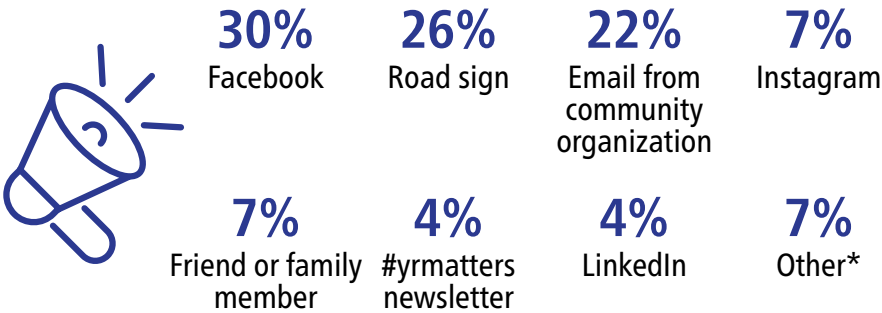
Where business respondents are located



How many employees you have:

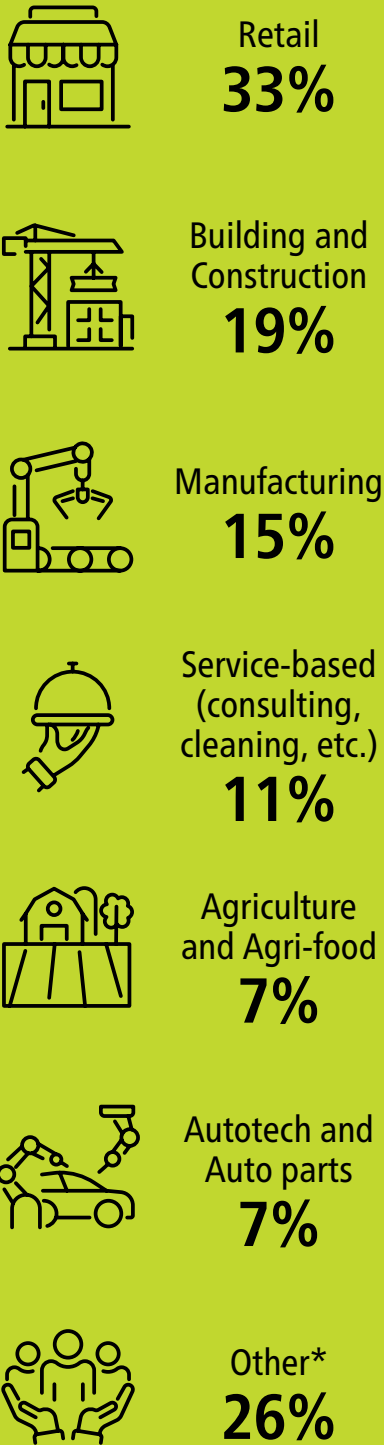


How you heard about this survey



*Other responses included; government employee and familiar with the Circular Economy Working Group's efforts

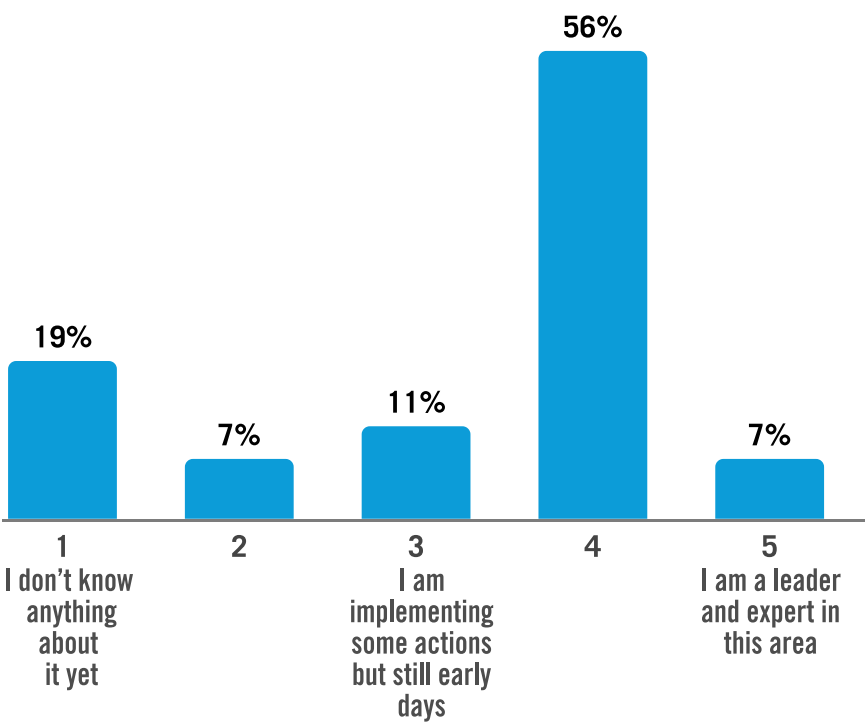
What type of business you operate:



*Other responses include; education and community support, equestrian coaching and horse care, games, small engine repair, radio station, sports, volunteer organization

What you said

How you ranked your level of circular economy knowledge:



**Based on 27 responses

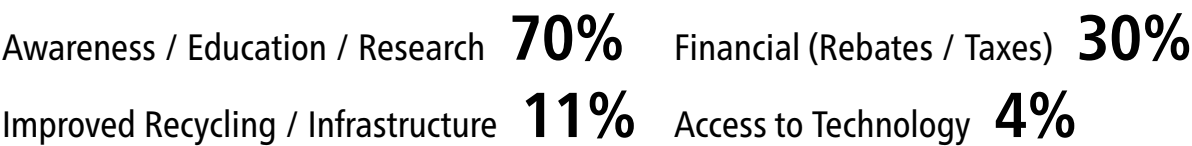
For those that selected a response of 3 or higher (85%) we asked a follow-up question:

How long have you been leading/implementing circular economy practices?



**Based on 20 responses

What kinds of supports would you need to increase your knowledge and actions:



Note: Respondents could select more than one option



Circular actions your business is routinely doing:



74%
Minimize waste in operations or facilities



67%
Donate or repurpose surplus goods or assets to keep them out of landfill



59%
Avoid producing or using single-use items/packaging



59%
Reuse items



52%
Use recycled content or upcycle waste materials in operations



41%
Facilitate reuse, repair, refurbishment or recycling of materials from other businesses



41%
Repair or refurbish equipment



33%
Recycle facility or operational waste



19%
Other*



11%
Protect or restore natural areas on the property or through services

*Other responses include; repurposing packaging, reducing packaging waste, purchasing sustainable products

Note: Respondents could select more than one option

A sample of “how” you participate in these initiatives

“Salvage used, good used parts, recycling as much packaging as the Region allows”

“Instead of buying single-use plastic mailing envelopes/sleeves, we choose to recycle packaging envelopes and boxes that we collect from friends and family to ship our orders”

“We minimize waste in our operations by using zero-waste design techniques and collecting every scrap of fabric which we then recycle into projects (filling for pillows, puff jackets, stuffed animals etc., and recycle scraps into paper products)”

“We ensure any new fabrics purchased are made with natural or recycled fibers; for example: recycled rayon, or recycled polyester fabric which is made with plastic water bottles”

“A radio station uses clean hydro to power it’s transmissions”

“Sell low waste items, offer community recycling programs, repurpose jar donations, work with businesses to cut waste in packaging, offer items up for reuse when we can no longer use them”

“As a wood shop, we sell our cut-offs as kindling, the excess sawdust gets donated to farms, and any excess material is donated to the Restore”

“Our e-waste program provides us with access to gently-used PC’s and laptops that we, with the previous owners permission, refurbish and donate back out into our local community, the region and on a few occasions beyond to individuals, families and groups that have need of but otherwise can’t afford”

Note: Comments may have been edited for clarity



“Reuse spent coffee grinds and turn into an exfoliating coffee soap”

“We recover surplus fabrics/garments which we repurpose into new clothing/accessories/lifestyle products”

“Donate handcrafted puzzles to the local community free art library”

“Our packaging is designed to be reused and refilled”

“I find used and broken toys and bicycles that people are throwing away. I clean, repair and fix them to sell”

Have you established a relationship with any organization(s) to repurpose surplus materials?

Yes 52% No 48%

Additional information provided:

- Donate sawdust to farms and excess wood materials to ReStore and shop classes
- Donate unused promotional materials to various charities
- Donate unused food to food bank partners
- Offer surplus business materials to individuals or other businesses
- Partnered with a company to sterilize packaging for reuse
- Purchase deadstock fabrics from two local businesses
- Receive donations and surplus garments for use in new products
- Scrap metal is picked up bi-annually at a minimum
- Use recycling bins for industrial products
- Work with many partners

Do you repurpose unused materials from another business?

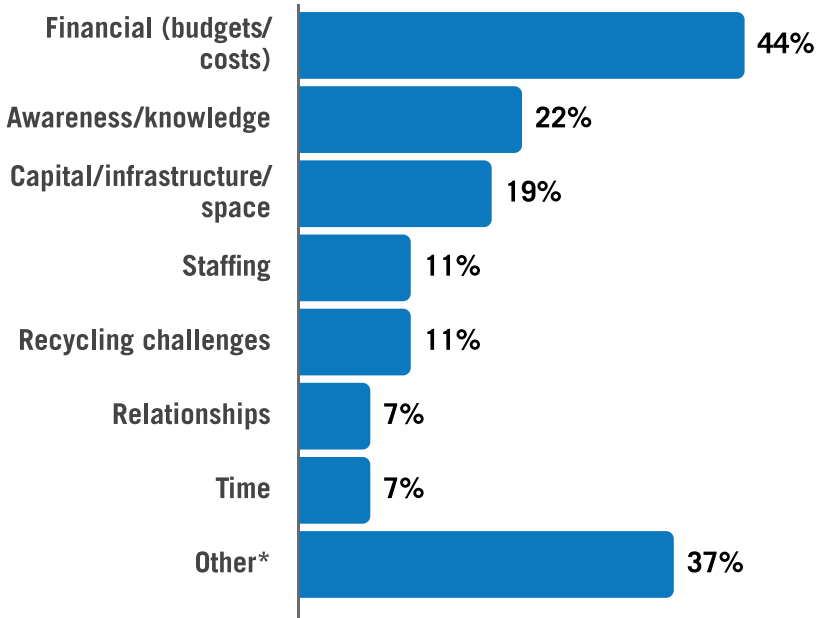
Yes 37% No 63%

Additional information provided:

- Packaging materials are collected and reused for shipping orders
- Occasionally use wood from other organizations
- Use deadstock fabrics from other suppliers
- Sell items found in repossessed vehicles
- Repurpose or sell electronics from businesses that are no longer needed

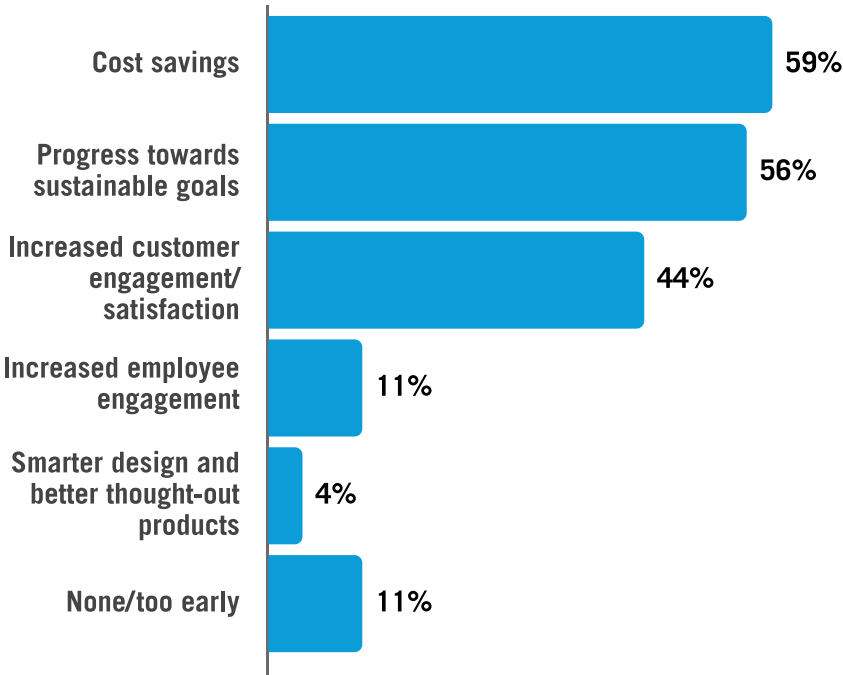


What are the top two barriers preventing your business from adopting further circular economy practices?



*Other responses included; capacity, food safety, location, more options, stigma, weather, not sure
Note: Percentages will total more than 100% as respondents provided two responses

What benefits has your organization seen from implementing circular economy actions?



Note: Percentages will total more than 100% as respondents could select multiple options

Are you familiar with any of the following circular economy initiatives to support local businesses in York Region?



Note: Percentages will total more than 100% as respondents could select multiple options



Next steps

The webinar and surveys provided the opportunity for residents and business owners to share their thoughts about the circular economy and let York Region know what they are currently doing. Several organizations were open to York Region following up with them to learn more about their business and circular economy practices.

Information shared by business will be used by York Region and community partners to highlight circular economy champions, provide additional business resources online and inform future programs.

All information gathered will assist York Region in creating future programs and resources to support a circular economy.

Thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback.

To learn more about a circular economy and join the circular movement, visit york.ca/CircularEconomy

