



SDG 12 signals a global shift to more sustainable ways of consumption and production that will protect our planet and move us toward a green economy.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

**The Learning
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Many community foundations are exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their planning, granting, convening, Vital Signs and more. This Fact Sheet is part of a series that focuses on specific SDGs to engage and inspire community foundations of all sizes to deepen their work around these goals.

What is this approach?

The **targets of SDG 12** focus on ensuring sustainable natural resource management, reducing and safely managing waste through recycling, reuse and other means, promoting sustainable livelihoods and increasing institutional sustainability. If current consumption and production patterns continue, we will be using four times the Earth’s resources by 2050 ([source](#)), and we are already generating enormous amounts of plastic, electronic and food waste ([source](#)). At the same time, there are signs of improvement, with declining fossil fuel subsidies, growing sustainable procurement practices by governments and 93% of the world’s largest companies now reporting on sustainability ([source](#)). Canada has also shown signs of decoupling economic growth from environmental impacts, with GHG emissions decreasing by 0.4% between 2000 and 2018 and GDP increasing by 43% ([source](#)). However, Canada faces serious challenges to achieving SDG 12, as the producer of the most waste per capita in the world (Statista 2019) and the country with the fourth-largest ecological footprint on the planet ([source](#)).

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Ecological Footprint

Ecological footprint measures the pressure for resources each person, group or human activity places on the planet. The Ecological Footprint indicator tells us how much biologically productive land space (e.g., forests, farm lands, fisheries) a population needs in order to provide the resources being used and to absorb the waste being generated by that population.

— [CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING](#)

Canada does not have a national strategy for SDG 12 but draws on a range of government policies to define its approach. The national lead on SDG 12 is **Employment and Social Development Canada**, with significant leadership required from provincial and local governments. Provincially, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment has developed a Canada-wide strategy to achieve zero plastic waste as well as an action plan for ensuring producer responsibility for their products ([source](#)).

Taken together, these strategies outline a national approach to SDG 12 that focuses on:

- Increasing the development and use of clean technology in the natural resource sector, including waste reduction and reuse.
- Embracing green procurement and the adoption of clean technologies and services in government.
- Promoting the leadership role of women, gender-diverse people, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) folks and youth in sustainable consumption and production practices.
- Working with industry toward 100% reusable, recyclable or recoverable plastics.
- Focusing on developing a circular economy that aims to reduce waste and retain the value of products.

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Circular Economy

In response to the traditional linear economy where companies “take-make-dispose,” a circular economy explores ways to reduce waste by extending the life cycle of products and materials. Applicable to all sectors, a circular economy goes beyond the notions of reuse, recycle and reduce to maximize value by addressing how products are designed, produced, distributed, used and reintegrated into the market.

— [CANADA VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2018](#)

Sustainable use and management of natural resources intersects with national commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action include respect for Indigenous ownership of land and natural resources, and any movement toward a circular economy must engage with the traditional caretakers of these resources and ensure that they benefit Indigenous communities on their own terms. In particular, the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(Call to Action 43\)](#) requires Indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent to projects affecting their lands, territories and other resources ([source](#)).

Canadian households drive the nation's consumption and production patterns, the same households that feel the effects of pollution, waste dumping and the loss of natural resources.

Local communities are leading the way in responding to SDG 12 through a variety of means:

- Municipal governments adopting procurement policies that make sure public money is spent on sustainable products and services.
- Zero waste programs in schools, businesses and public institutions.
- Local repair or rental hubs, where community members can rent tools, or bring broken items and appliances rather than throwing them out.
- Household and municipal composting to turn food waste into fertilizer and biofuel.
- Businesses selling products that are biodegradable, recyclable or made from recycled products.
- Community education campaigns about sustainable lifestyles and ways of shopping and using products that do not harm the environment.
- Community roadmaps for transitioning to a circular economy that identify opportunities to reduce waste, overconsumption and pollution.

Why is it important for grantmakers?

SDG 12 represents an opportunity for community foundations to take local action on some of the biggest challenges facing Canadians, including climate change, pollution, food security and the need for new clean jobs and industries. Canadian households account for 50% of water consumption ([source](#)), 12% of energy consumption ([source](#)) and 21% of food waste ([source](#)), compared to commercial, institutional and other non-residential sectors. Cities and towns have influence over 50% of Canada's GHG emissions ([source](#)). Action at the community scale can have big impacts and is already driving progress on SDG 12, with Canadian households surpassing national progress in energy and water efficiency as well as reductions in greenhouse gas emissions ([source](#)). A report by the National Zero Waste Council reveals that further waste reduction could prevent 4.9 million tonnes of domestic waste and avoid 5 million tonnes of GHG emissions, while creating almost 20,000 jobs and \$41 billion in revenue ([source](#)). Despite these opportunities, SDG 12 is one of the least funded goals in Canada, with only \$26 million provided by foundations in 2016/2017 ([source](#)).

For decades, scientists have been explaining the ways in which humanity is driving the three planetary crises of climate, biodiversity and pollution, all of which are linked to unsustainable production and consumption. Changes in consumption and production patterns can help to promote the decoupling of economic growth and human well-being from resource use and environmental impact. They can also trigger the transformations envisaged in global commitments on biodiversity, the climate and sustainable development in general.

— [UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS](#)





There exists a pattern in Canada where marginalized groups, and Indigenous peoples in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada.

— [UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR BASKUT TUNCAK](#)

Tackling SDG 12 is an opportunity for foundations to address the legacy and continued impacts of environmental racism in Canada. There is growing awareness of the disproportionate harm that BIPOC Canadians have experienced from unsustainable ways of consuming and producing. Examples include the air and water pollution experienced by Indigenous communities in Ontario’s “Chemical Valley,” which led a UN special rapporteur to declare that “Indigenous and racialized communities in Canada, are disproportionately affected by toxic waste” ([source](#)). In Nova Scotia, the Black community of Africville was targeted as the site for industrial and municipal dumping, leading to its eventual disbandment, while Indigenous and racialized community members in Nova Scotia continue to suffer from polluted water to this day ([source](#)).

Canadian discussion on the circular economy has been overshadowed by the national emphasis on climate change and clean growth. Both approaches focus on a low-carbon economy, economic growth, innovation and new technologies, but the circular economy responds to a broader set of environmental drivers, uses a broader set of responses and looks for a system-scale, deeper level of innovation — business as well as technological. As such, it holds the potential for the deeper emission reductions critical to the climate file, but could also be more disruptive to the current model of the economy.

— [GETTING TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY](#)



Grantmakers are part of a growing movement that is tackling the social and environmental impacts of unsustainable lifestyles, while working toward circular economies that benefit all. Nationally, the [Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#) is bringing together 15 communities to develop circular economies through peer learning, action workshops and expert mentoring. The [Low Carbon Cities Canada](#) (LC3) network brings together major cities to accelerate urban climate solutions, including the creation of zero waste circular economies. Businesses are also collaborating through [Global Compact Network Canada](#), which promotes “responsible business practices and the advancement of SDGs”.

Community foundations are part of this movement through their support for hundreds of community projects and partnerships that are already advancing SDG 12:

- Vancouver Foundation’s [East Van Green](#) program works with small-scale urban farmers to ensure [zero waste food systems](#).
- The [Victoria Foundation’s support for the Greater Victoria Food Rescue program](#) is diverting over \$2 million of fresh produce from landfill to hungry homes.
- The Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island’s [Environment and Sustainability Fund](#) includes support for activities that promote a circular economy.
- Many recycling programs are supported by community foundations, including the local recycling society supported by the [Maple Ridge Community Foundation](#).
- Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation supports the [KW Library of Things](#) where people can borrow infrequently used items such as tools, garden equipment, kitchen appliances or camping gear.
- The [Investment Readiness Program provided funding for the Canadian launch of K-Lumet](#), a social entrepreneurship initiative that employs people with diverse abilities to produce recycled firestarters.

Common principles to get started

Patterns of consumption and production are woven into our daily lives but are often taken for granted. SDG 12 presents an opportunity to reflect on how our organizations, our granting and our own lifestyles directly impact the economy, our ecosystems and one another. Getting started with SDG 12 involves considering these connections and how we can leverage them to support thriving and sustainable communities for all.

01 Learn and understand

- Use Vital Signs and Vital Conversations to identify and track SDG 12 issues in your community. See the work of [London Community Foundation](#), which used an SDG lens in their Vital Conversations.
- Learn if your municipality is part of the [Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#) or [LC3 network](#) and consider partnering with their work or encouraging them to join.
- Gather data that allows you to understand which community members have been most affected by waste and pollution and how to best support the different issues they are facing.

02 Strategic grantmaking

- Consider using impact investing to support local businesses and social entrepreneurs whose work aligns with SDG 12, such as [K-Lumet](#).
- Encourage zero waste and circular economy initiatives through your environmental funding, and consider creating dedicated funds such as those provided by [The Community Foundation for Ireland](#).
- Support community education programs that improve water and energy efficiency and reduce, reuse or recycle domestic waste. Visit [Zero Waste Canada](#) for examples of educational initiatives.

- Prioritize community initiatives that use waste products to meet community needs, such as supporting sustainable agriculture or addressing food insecurity by reducing food waste. See the work of the [Victoria](#) and [Vancouver](#) foundations.
- Provide targeted grants for communities or community members disproportionately affected by waste, pollution or overconsumption.

03 Integrate SDG 12 into your operations

- Look into your existing procurement policy, or develop a new one that includes commitments to purchasing products and services that are sustainable. Visit the website of [Sustainability Leadership](#), which includes a model procurement policy.
- Become a Zero Waste organization. Visit [Zero Waste Canada](#) for tips as well as information on how to get certified.
- Include funding for sustainable procurement and waste reduction in your granting to cover the additional costs of goods and services that align with SDG 12.
- Consider making the purchase of sustainable goods and services a grant criteria for some or all of your funds.

04 Lead and collaborate

- Encourage your local government and major institutions, such as local colleges or universities, to adopt sustainable procurement policies.
- Partner with local business who have adopted [sustainability reporting](#), and look at how you can support the spread of sustainability reporting in other industries.
- Convene community conversations to explore circular economy projects, including through innovation labs such as Leeds Community Foundation's support for a [Circular Lab](#) in the UK.
- Work with your local government to support the transition to a circular economy, for example by developing a community roadmap. See this [guide for cities](#) and these [case studies of cities shifting to a circular economy](#).

Resource list

Zero Waste Canada

- A website that focuses on supporting communities, nonprofits and businesses in adopting zero waste strategies and practices.
- The Our Policies tab has key definitions and principles for understanding and designing zero waste strategies.
- The Community Resources page has a range of educational resources.

National Zero Waste Council

- A website with a local government approach to circular economies and zero waste, including a focus on design and behaviour change.
- The Focus Areas tab has key information on circular economy, food, plastics and waste prevention.
- The About Us tab has links to key publications developed by the Council.

Sustainable Consumption and Production: Strategies for Accelerating Positive Change

- An older report whose guidance is still relevant for grantmakers looking to support SDG 12.
- Pages 11-14 provide an overview of where grantmakers can have an impact.
- Pages 15-48 look at specific impact opportunities, including consumer awareness, policy engagement and sustainable business practices.

Ellen MacArthur Foundation

- A global philanthropic leader in funding and promoting circular economies.
- The Circular Economy tab provides key information on the concept as well as case studies.
- The Resources tab has reports, toolkits and case studies for supporting a circular economy.

Circular Economy Guidebook for Cities

- A 27-page report that takes a city perspective on SDG 12 issues.
- Pages 10-11 explore what a vision for a circular city could look like.
- Pages 12-22 look at actions for achieving circularity as well as the benefits.

C40 Cities

- A 70-page report that provides case studies from economically developed cities comparable to Canadian cities.
- Pages 14-65 provide case studies of circular economy strategies for cities.
- Pages 78-93 look at case studies of municipal procurement policies.