



GREEN DEAL  
CIRCULAR  
PROCUREMENT



# HOW TO RUN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT

A GUIDE BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES GREEN DEAL CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT IN FLANDERS



Interreg  
North Sea Region  
ProCirc  
European Regional Development Fund



WE MAKE  
TOMORROW  
BEAUTIFUL  
OVAM

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*“With this whitepaper we would like to share our experiences with everyone who is setting up a community of practice on circular procurement. This paper guides you through the methodology of our learning trajectory and it provides you with tips and tricks to stimulate peer to peer learning. We hope it inspires you to make a success of your own community of practice.”*

## **Team Circular Flanders**

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# COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice (CoP) create a unique learning network: participants learn together and inspire each other. Bottlenecks for progress are brought to light and practical solutions are shared. Communities of practice give visibility to the engagement of participants and can help to convince others to take the leap forward.

When setting up a community of practice in Flanders on circular procurement in 2017, the partners opted for the format of a 'Green Deal'. *Green Deals* are voluntary agreements between companies, organisations and the government. They aim to generate concrete action on a sustainability topic. Green Deals generally have a life span of two to three years and focus on concrete action. The main asset is the co-creation by public and private partners.<sup>1</sup>

Monbaliu (2020)<sup>2</sup> advises to make agreements explicit between initiating partners when starting a learning network:

- Clarity on the concept: What is in or out of scope?
- Goals: What will (and will not) be done together? What are the personal agenda's?
- Resources: How will costs, profits, work and network be shared?
- Visibility: Which logos will be used? What use is allowed for databases?

Contrary to popular belief, making sustainable and circular choices can also be economically beneficial. To convince management, shareholders, clients and colleagues, it is important to be able to prove that a business case for 'going green' is realistic. Communities of practice are most successful when they facilitate a plethora of experiments in the field. These cases can be used to prove the feasibility and profitability.<sup>3</sup>

## Why circular procurement?

Circular procurement creates a demand and trigger for the market to offer circular products, services and innovations. It uses spending volumes to create positive impact and acts as an enabler for the transition to a more circular economy.

In Belgium, public procurement alone represents 15% of the GDP. This represents a spending volume of 40 to 50 billion euro or almost 20.000 public procurements.<sup>4</sup> The potential for impact on the transition to a more circular economy is proportionally large.

## Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement

The Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement (GDCA) was inspired by the Dutch Green Deal on Circular Procurement (GDCl). The GDCl was very successful in promoting circular procurement as a lever for circular economy.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch cooperation is currently continued in a learning network and 'Big Buyers' groups which are facilitated by a private party.<sup>6</sup>

Circular Flanders contacted the existing networks that would prove to be crucial for a good Green Deal: representation of companies (The Shift), the Flemish Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and NGO's (Bond Beter Leefmilieu). These partners joined forces to set up a Flemish Green. This partnership and the combination of their communities is one of the greatest success factors of the GDCA.

**Circular Flanders** is the hub and the inspiration for the Flemish circular economy. It is a partnership of governments, businesses, civil society, and the knowledge community who are taking action together.

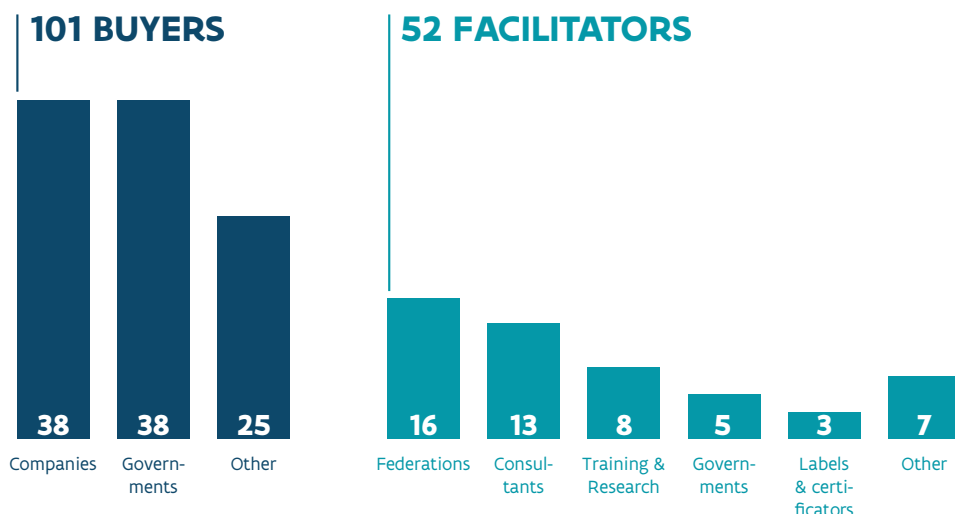
**The Shift** is the Belgian meeting point for sustainability. Together with their members and partners they want to realise the transition to a more sustainable society and economy.

**VVSG** is the representative, knowledge hub and network builder for local governments.

**Bond Beter Leefmilieu** collaborates with organisations, citizens, governments and businesses towards a sustainable, renewable society.

June 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, 153 participants signed the Green Deal on Circular Procurement Charter. Each of the 101 participating buyers committed to set up at least two circular procurement projects. The 52 facilitation participants pledged to use their varied expertise to support the procurers. The participants formed a unique learning network. Experimenting, sharing knowledge and experience and exploring new forms of chain cooperation.

## Who's in?



The Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement ended with a closing event and international Buyer meet Supplier on November 21<sup>st</sup> 2019. The lessons learned from the Flemish GDCA are shared on [www.circularprocurement.be](http://www.circularprocurement.be).



Circular Flanders continues the work on circular procurement within the Interreg North Sea Region ProCirc project. The organising partners engaged the GDCA-network in spring 2020 to launch product group specific communities of practice on circular procurement.

# METHODOLOGY

## 1. Before the Green Deal






### Common language

There are numerous definitions available for circular procurement. Furthermore, in Flanders anno 2017, the term was certainly not generally known.<sup>3</sup> To tackle this issue, a group of 90 procurers and circularity experts were asked to come up with a shared definition. This created a common language for the participants in the Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement.

**Sustainable procurement** is the use of purchasing power for maximum positive ecological, social and economic impact throughout the lifecycle of work, services and goods (ISO 20400:2017).

**Circular Procurement** is an extension to sustainable procurement. It aims to actively close energy and material loops throughout the supply chain. The focus is on maximum value retention of products, components and materials that are procured and the reduction of waste.

**A circular procurement process** focuses on the changing functional needs of the users within the organisation. It stimulates maximal co-operation and co-creation between all actors that can contribute to closing the loop.

<b>A</b>  Reduce total amount of materials	<b>B</b>  Reduce amount of virgin inputs	<b>C</b>  Extend the useful life	<b>D</b>  Maximise the reusability of a product or component	<b>E</b>  Maximise the reusability or recyclability of materials
<b>A 1</b> Internal sharing	<b>B 1</b> Understanding the share of recycled, biobased and virgin materials present	<b>C 1</b> Extending guarantees	<b>D 1</b> Design for Disassembly	<b>E 1</b> Design for recycling
<b>A 2</b> Renting or peer to peer sharing	<b>B 2</b> Increasing the amount of recycled content	<b>C 2</b> Contractual arrangements for maintenance and repair	<b>D 2</b> Modular design	<b>E 2</b> Understanding materials
<b>A 3</b> Reuse, refurbishing or upgrading	<b>B 3</b> Increasing the amount of biobased content	<b>C 3</b> Upgradable products	<b>D 3</b> Standardised design	<b>E 3</b> Contractual arrangements for take back and recycling
<b>A 4</b> Minimal use of materials in design		<b>C 4</b> Design for longevity	<b>D 4</b> Understanding the internal composition and connections	<b>E 4</b> Reducing or banning toxicity
<b>A 5</b> Less waste		<b>C 5</b> Repairability and maintainability	<b>D 5</b> Contractual arrangements for take back and reuse	<b>E 5</b> Biologically degradable / compostable
<b>GOALS AND STRATEGIES FOR CIRCULAR PURCHASERS</b>		<b>C 6</b> Modular/change oriented design	<b>D 6</b> Stimulate circular business models	<b>E 6</b> Stimulate circular business models
		<b>C 7</b> Contractual incentives for extension of useful life		
		<b>C 8</b> Supplier guidance for use optimization		



## Testing the waters

Prior to the Green Deal, a workshop was held for five product groups: textile, catering, ICT, office furniture and construction.

These workshops assessed the interest for a community of practice among buyers and suppliers as well as involving knowledge institutions, federations and consultants. Furthermore, they mapped out ambitions, potential stakeholders and buyer needs for each product group. The results were visualised in infographics that could be used to inform potential stakeholders per sector, as well as to stimulate consultants to create new circular services.

## GREEN DEAL CIRCULAIR AANKOPEN / ICT / KERNPRINCIPES WORKSHOP 30 MAART 2017

### 7 AMBITIES



- 1 De levensduur van de toestellen verlengen door ze zo lang mogelijk binnen de eigen organisatie te gebruiken
- 2 Functioneel specificeren en differentiëren van de toestellen in functie van de noden van de eindgebruiker
- 3 Toestellen met universele standaardonderdelen/materialen kopen/huren/leasen die makkelijk demonteerbaar en/of vervangbaar zijn doorheen de volledige levensduur
- 4 Maximaal hergebruik én waardebehoud van grondstoffen en componenten aanmoedigen
- 5 Innovatie op de (recyclage)markt stimuleren door 'oplossingen' voor maximaal hergebruik en waardebehoud te vragen
- 6 Continue samenwerking tussen aankoper, leverancier en gebruiker om in te spelen op veranderende behoeften
- 7 Transparantie over sociaal verantwoorde productie in de globale productieketens van elektronica eisen



### WAT HEBBEN AANKOPERS NODIG?



Tools die strategische beslissingen mogelijk maken: checklists, inspiratie door goede praktijken...



Ondersteuning en coaching voor de bepaling van de behoefte en voor de opmaak van het bestek



Marktinformatie en dialoog om inzicht te krijgen van de innovatieve mogelijkheden op de markt



Tactische tools: kostencalculatie en -vergelijking, contracten, criteria-documenten, juridisch advies...



Standaardbestekken, -contracten en inspirerende voorbeelden



Tools om de totale kosten te meten voor én tijdens het gebruik



Zicht op de mogelijkheden om toestellen en componenten maximaal te hergebruiken op het einde van de levensfase

This is an example of the infographic generated by the workshop on ICT (in Dutch). It states 7 ambitions, a circle of potential stakeholders and 7 needs procurers of ICT have.

## 2. The Green Deal Charter

The CEO or chair of each of the participants was asked to sign a 'Green Deal on Circular Procurement Charter' to formalise their engagement to take action. This formality is important to create a support base within the organisations. Yet, signing a charter is only the start of an internal change process. This was clearly indicated in the engagement text that the CEO's signed: they committed to changing the way their organisation is buying in a structural way, with a long term vision.

Since we had a mix of public and private organisations we did not allow any suppliers in this network, as this could create conflicts with the public procurement law. We did involve them during Buyer meet Supplier events, as mentioned in §5.





### 3. Inspiration and action days

An official launch of the Green Deal is important to gather CEOs (and other decision makers) as well as the actual buyers and suppliers. To create an impactful learning trajectory, it is important to physically bring the participants together. This allows them to learn collectively, create a network and find opportunities for cooperation.

Some advice on inspiration and action days<sup>3</sup>:

- Put your participants to work on concrete themes or projects, in order for them to feel engaged.
- Choose the sequence and content of these days in a way that participants experience progress and growth.
- Inspiring cases are a must, they prove feasibility.
- Do not only show success stories, but also leave room for learnings from participants.
- Choose venues that can showcase good examples.
- Diversify locations in order to keep them accessible for participants from all over the country or region.
- To make sure you also have something to offer for frontrunners, you might consider organising separate sessions for them.
- Make sure to leave plenty of room for networking.
- Combine plenary and break-out sessions.

During the first year of the Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement, emphasis was put on **inspiring** the participants with knowledge and (international) cases as well as on connecting participants and creating a community.

- 5/10/17 Inspiration and creating support within your organisation
- 7/12/17 Determining ambitions and needs for your organisation
- 30/03/18 Strategies for circular procurement projects and tools
- 23/05/18 Cooperation within the supply chain and market dialog + buyer meets supplier

During the second year of the Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement the focus moved from theory towards **practice** with the action days. This was the time to get started on their own circular procurement projects. Within Circular procurement teams, participants worked together on concrete cases.

- 25/09/18 Goals and strategies for circular procurers
- 4/12/18 Translating ambitions into a tender
- 14/03/19 Awarding circular tenders and market dialog
- 11/06/19 Measuring circular impact during execution of the contract

# Topics of the GDCP projects



## 4. Peer-to-Peer Teams

Forming smaller teams of participants (2-20 people), allows for peer-to-peer learning and consultation on certain subjects or cases. The peer-to-peer teams generate new insights and solutions for challenges. Some steering might be necessary, for instance in offering subjects for discussion, cases or desired outcomes.

Advice on peer-to-peer teams<sup>3</sup>:

- The participants in the teams should have some common ground in order to facilitate exchange and interaction. Choose the constitution accordingly.
- Keep discussions close to practice.
- Provide a facilitator to moderate the discussions and keep everyone on topic, or challenge the participants when needed.
- Try to create a mix of frontrunners and newbies. If there are very little experienced participants, it might be interesting to invite external people to present their experience.
- Clearly define the desired outcomes.
- Ask teams to write short minutes of their meetings. This allows to share learnings with other teams.
- Providing a participants list with it makes it easier for participants outside of the team to get in touch.
- If the constitution of the team is kept throughout the Green Deal, the members can learn and grow together and form a network.
- It is an option to ask all Green Deal participants for possible topics to discuss within these themes at the beginning / during the Green Deal.
- Participants can present their challenges related to the theme topic, and 1 or 2 can be chosen to discuss (intervention technique).
- Preparation of a market dialogue could be an assignment for the teams.

In the Flemish Green Deal 10 Circular Procurement Teams were formed, based on the different product groups.



## 5. Buyer meets Supplier Events

A Buyer meets Supplier event offers an opportunity for buyers to see what kind of circular solutions are available on the market. This helps them to put realistic criteria in their tenders.

For suppliers it is an opportunity to find out what kind of needs exist and which organisations are looking for circular answers. They can explore what is worth innovating on. It also offers them visibility and credit.

The Buyer meet Supplier events in during the Flemish GDCA consisted of:

- Market dialogues between buyers and suppliers per product group  
Buyers and suppliers discuss the circular challenges from both perspectives. They take place on opposite sides of a large table and the discussion is led by a moderator. The buyers are updated on the circular offer on the market. The suppliers are challenged to innovate in circularity when they hear the buyers' needs.
- B2B matchmaking  
Participants and experts create an online profile and offer or query in the professional matchmaking app Conversations starter. They are able to pre-book appointments for the event. This way everyone can maximally profit from the networking time and have fruitful one-to-one conversations.
- A market place where suppliers show their offers to potential clients

Advice on Buyer meet Supplier events<sup>3</sup>:

- Try to attract people from outside of the community of practice to these events, in order to keep them interesting for suppliers as well as buyers.



During the Flemish Green Deal on Circular Procurement two Buyer meet Supplier events were held, with over 200 participants each.

## 6. Online Learning Platform

It might be convenient to have a central, online platform to offer information to - and interaction between - participants. It can also function as a platform to host webinars, trainings, share slides after events, host chat sessions with experts or create a library.

Advice on online learning platforms:

- Consider keeping the platform exclusive for your participants (with a login), as an added asset. This also creates a safe environment for them to ask questions and vent good as well as bad experiences.
- Using a login allows to track traffic on your platform. This will help you to gauge interest in certain topics and report numbers if this is required.
- Ask your participants for permission to share their contact details and projects between participants. This way you can offer a project catalogue which encourages interaction and networking.
- Make a list of desired attributes before you choose a type of platform or provider. You could consider hosting webinars, offering learning packages, a chat function or a database of projects.
- Keeping participants active on an online platform is generally quite the challenge. It is worth thinking through how you will go about this.
- Moderating this platform and answering questions will take up some time. Make sure someone can tend to this.
- Have a plan in place for disseminating the gathered information to a wider audience after the first phase of the learning network is finished. This could be through a website such as [www.circularprocurement.be](http://www.circularprocurement.be) but there are many other options.

## 7. Keeping track of progress

It is important to keep track of the participant's projects, their progress and impact. For the coordinators as well as for the participants themselves.

Advice on progress tracking<sup>3</sup>:

- If you have a large number of participants, it might be efficient to use a dedicated software or tool for this.
- Try to incorporate guidance on goals, strategies and ambitions for the projects.
- Keep the needs of your participants in mind when choosing or developing a system.
- Decide with the participants which indicators will be measured.
- The tool must be extremely user friendly otherwise the response rate will be low.
- A manual or training might be necessary to activate participants to start using it.

The Flemish GDCA used a customised tool that was developed in cooperation with Circular IQ. The aim was both to keep an overview of all projects; and for participants to set ambitions and measure their project's impact. Based on the circular ambition map, a number of questions were listed to quantify ambitions and circularity progress. Some of these questions can be answered by the buyers, others need input from the supplier. These questions were then answered at different phases in the procurement process:

- Baseline phase: business-as-usual
- Ambition phase: what would you like to achieve
- Contract phase: what is agreed in contract
- Realised impact phase: what has actually been delivered

The tool generates a visual report, which can also be used for dialogue within the organisation.

## 2. OVERZICHT DOELSTELLINGEN EN STRATEGIËN

 <b>A</b>  Totale hoeveelheid materialen reduceren	 <b>B</b>  Niet-hernieuwbare virgin input reduceren	 <b>C</b>  Gebruiksduur verlengen	 <b>D</b>  Potentieel hergebruik van product of component maximaliseren	 <b>E</b>  Potentieel hergebruik van materiaal maximaliseren – recycleerbaarheid
A 1 Intern delen	B 1 Inzicht in aandeel recycled, biobased en virgin materialen	C 1 Garanties oprekken	D 1 Design for Disassembly	E 1 Design for recycling
A 2 Huren of peer to peer delen	B 2 Aandeel recycled content verhogen	C 2 Contractuele afspraken onderhoud en herstel	D 2 Modulair ontwerp	E 2 Inzicht in materialen
A 3 Hergebruik, refurbishing of upgraden	B 3 Aandeel biobased content verhogen	C 3 Upgradebare producten	D 3 Gestandaardiseerd ontwerp	E 3 Contractuele afspraken terugname en recyclage
A 4 Minimaal gebruik van materiaal in ontwerp		C 4 Ontwerpen voor lange levensduur	D 4 Inzicht in samenstelling en verbindingen	E 4 Verminderen van toxiciteit
A 5 Minder afval		C 5 Repareerbaarheid en onderhoudbaarheid	D 5 Contractuele afspraken terugname en hergebruik	E 5 Biologisch afbreekbaar/-composteerbaar
		C 6 Modulair/veranderingsgericht ontwerp	D 6 Circulaire verdienmodellen stimuleren	E 6 Circulaire verdienmodellen stimuleren
		C 7 Contractueel stimuleren van gebruiksduurverlenging		
		C 8 Advies over gebruiksoptimalisatie door leverancier		

Through the evaluation we found out that participants found the tool to be complex and time consuming, which resulted in the low response rate. This might be because of the level of detail of the questions, and the fact that some of the questions have to be answered by the supplier or even the production site. The exercise is in balancing asking for enough detail to provide a qualitative analysis, with user friendliness.

## 8. Social media and newsletter

A newsletter is an easy way to share information with your participants that might complement the learning platform. If you would like to offer the possibility of interaction, you could also opt for a social media group or page. If you would like to open discussions, you could also invite buyers or experts from outside of the community of practice.

Advice on social media and newsletters:

- Make sure to comply with General Data Protection Regulation.
- Engaging people on social media might require a lot of effort. Consider whether the aim is to feed information or to encourage interaction when choosing a medium.
- Use these media to showcase the projects of your participants.

For the Flemish GDCA a newsletter was sent out on a regular basis and a closed LinkedIn Group allowed for swift sharing of information and interaction with and between participants. We used this LinkedIn group also to provide a platform for suppliers to inform the procurers of the latest circular products or services. It is currently opened up internationally for everyone to join: circular procurement learning network.

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# FLEMISH GREEN DEAL ON CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT RESULTS

The results of two years of Flemish community of practice on circular procurement are now shared on a dedicated website [www.circularprocurement.be](http://www.circularprocurement.be). It showcases procurement projects and circular suppliers, but also offers concrete information per product category.

The procuring participants and suppliers confirmed that the Flemish market for circular products and services has grown. This is a direct result of the participant's effort to put circular criteria into their tenders.<sup>3</sup>



# 10 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

1. Find yourself complementary partners to share the coordination with and meanwhile appeal to different existing networks.
2. Make sure your community of practice has something to offer to newbies as well as more experienced participants.
3. Ask for a sign off from participating organisations' management. This will greatly help spreading the message internally and support the people on the work floor.
4. Action is key for learning. Make your participants run experiments and exchange their successes and failures with each other.
5. Co-create the learning track: the content as well as the process. Let participants describe their expectations on a Community of Practice and build it up step by step and always together. Making it suit their needs benefits motivation and involvement.
6. Determine ahead what kind of information you would like to capture and how you will go about it.
7. The network itself is one of the biggest assets of a community. It pays off to facilitate networking, especially in the early stages.
8. Involve suppliers. They are eager to learn about the needs of buyers and are also able to provide insight in the circular innovations in their sector.
9. Make your communication material clear and attractive. A defined style and clear information motivate and engage participants.
10. Keep your eye on the future. Start thinking about the long term at the start of your community of practice. How will projects be up scaled? How will the lessons learned be shared? Who can we involve? Keep it in mind when co-creating your learning trajectory.

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