CREATIVE REUSE ON CAMPUS

A guide to exploring opportunities for creative reuse on your campus in conjunction with Goodwill® and other community partners.
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Reduce
The most effective step toward decreasing waste is to prevent its generation in the first place. Manufacturers and consumers can reduce consumption by choosing not to create or purchase an unneeded item; this is sometimes known as waste aversion.

Reuse
The next-best option for mitigating waste involves reusing an item, rather than discarding it. Goodwill provides consumers with the opportunity to sustainably reuse items by purchasing secondhand goods.

Repair
Through cycles of reuse, most items will eventually get damaged in some way. Therefore, repair is an essential step to extending the useful life of an object.

Upcycle
When an item is too damaged to repair, or its functionality is obsolete, upcycling is the ideal way to recycle the item. Upcycling refers to refabricating an item into something of higher quality than the original. For example, reconstructing a ripped T-shirt into a bag is upcycling.

Downcycle (Recycle)
Downcycling is similar to upcycling, except that the item is refabricated into something of lower quality than the original. For example, ripping up a damaged T-shirt into rags for industrial cleaning is downcycling. Most municipal recycling systems (e.g., plastics recycling) actually downcycle materials.¹

Dispose
Material disposal has many negative social and environmental consequences. Landfills and incinerators, the primary destinations of municipal waste in the U.S., release toxic substances into the groundwater and air, posing health risks to surrounding communities. These facilities are disproportionately placed in and near low-income communities and communities of color, thereby presenting a major environmental injustice associated with waste disposal.²
The Role of Goodwill in the Reuse Economy

While donating used items to Goodwill and other thrift stores is a great way to foster the reuse economy and keep materials out of landfills, it is only half of the picture. The demand for secondhand items must match the level of supply.

When surplus clothing and other goods do not sell in retail stores and outlets, Goodwill does its best to find alternatives to landfill to get the most value out of clothing and all the donations received to create jobs and revenue for its job placement and training programs and education services.

With this in mind, shopping used, rather than simply donating, is the most effective way for conscious consumers to ensure that secondhand materials are put to good use.

Increasingly, Goodwill's participation in the reuse economy relies on conscious shopping choices that work against throwaway culture in all its forms. Supporting college and university campuses in their creative reuse projects is one way that Goodwill helps promote the principles of reuse and foster the reuse economy. With this goal in mind, this manual exists to help foster creative reuse programming on your campus, in some cases via partnership opportunities with Goodwill and other thrift outlets.
For the past five years, Drexel University has given its used vinyl banners a second life through the university’s partnership with an industrial sewing program at Goodwill Industries of Southern New Jersey and Philadelphia (Maple Shade, NJ). The industrial sewing program provides rehabilitation and job training for people integrating back into society, while repurposing used vinyl banners from local businesses into tote bags to be sold at Goodwill retail stores.

Every six months, the Drexel Banners to Bags program puts out a call for banners in the campus newsletter. Used vinyl banners are collected by the Drexel program coordinator and brought to Goodwill for upcycling. Since many of the bags feature the Drexel logo, the University buys them back from Goodwill to use as sustainable giveaways!¹⁵,¹⁶
III. Repair Events

Definition

Though they can take many forms, repair events provide a physical time and space for students, faculty, staff and community members to learn to repair their own everyday items, like clothing, bicycles, and electronics. These events range in scale from a one-time dorm bonding activity teaching basic sewing stitches to an annual campus-wide repair fair staffed by skilled experts. Depending on the event, there may be room for exploration into upcycling and reuse as well! Skill sharing and collaboration play a key role in any successful repair event.

How It Builds the Reuse Economy

Learning about repair can empower students to seek ways to extend the lives of their possessions, rather than throwing things away immediately when they break. Repair events intervene at the point of consumption and the point of disposal.