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WE.Circular

D.2.4.3 CE Business Model Toolkit

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1. Introduction

The **CE Business Models Toolkit** has been developed within the WE.Circular project to provide practical guidance on how circular economy business models can be applied by women entrepreneurs and supported by digital solutions and smart technologies.

The toolkit builds on the circular business models developed in the project, the experience of participating companies, and inputs received through the peer-review process. These sources helped identify common challenges, possible circular solutions and practical actions that can support the transition from linear to circular business practices.

The toolkit is not intended to present individual companies in detail. Instead, it translates project experience into a general and easy-to-use guide that can be adapted by different companies, sectors and support organisations.

Its main purpose is to help users:

- understand the six circular business model types identified in the project;
- recognise which model, or combination of models, may be relevant in a specific context;
- identify practical actions that can support circular transition;
- understand how digital tools can support circular practices;
- consider possible partners, revenue streams and expected impacts.

The toolkit is designed as a practical working document. It avoids complex theory and focuses on ideas, examples and guidance that can be used in business support, workshops, peer learning or internal company planning.

It is intended for:

- women entrepreneurs and women-led SMEs;
- mentors, trainers and business advisors;
- business support organisations;
- innovation hubs, chambers and networks;
- organisations working on circular economy, sustainability, digitalisation or SME support.

How to start using this toolkit:

Companies do not need to apply all pathways or tools at once. A simple starting approach is to identify the main circular challenge in the business, select the pathway that best fits this challenge, choose one realistic action that can be tested, identify the partners or tools needed, and monitor a few simple results before scaling.

The toolkit recognises that circular transition is often gradual. For many micro and small companies, progress may begin with one product, one material flow, one customer activity or one partnership.

Who can benefit from the Toolkit?

The toolkit can be useful for companies that are already applying circular practices, as well as for those that are only beginning to explore circular economy opportunities. It is especially relevant for companies that want to reduce waste, use resources more efficiently, redesign products or services, introduce reuse or take-back models, improve production and logistics, use digital tools, increase customer trust, or build stronger circular partnerships.

Users can read the toolkit from beginning to end or go directly to the business model that is most relevant to their needs. For example, a company interested in reusable packaging may find useful ideas in the Production Optimizers, Smart Digital Enablers and Market Educators models. A company working with recycled materials may find Resource Champions and Collaborative Ecosystems more relevant.

The toolkit should be used flexibly. It does not prescribe one single path for all companies. Instead, it offers practical options that can be adapted, combined, tested and further developed depending on the company's sector, size, resources and level of readiness.

Examples and insights from WE.Circular are used to illustrate general approaches, such as reusable or refillable packaging, product redesign, digital product passports, QR codes, take-back systems, customer engagement, storytelling and partnerships. These examples are not presented as detailed company case studies, but as inspiration for other businesses facing similar challenges.

The toolkit therefore helps users move from general circular economy ideas to more concrete business model options and practical first steps.

2. Why circular and digital business model innovation matters

Many traditional businesses still follow a linear model: resources are extracted; products are made, sold, used and finally discarded. This approach often leads to high material consumption, waste generation, rising costs and missed opportunities to keep products, materials and value in use for longer.

Circular business models offer a different approach. They aim to reduce waste, use resources more efficiently, extend product lifetimes and create value through reuse, repair, refurbishment, sharing, refill, recycling, digital tracking and customer participation.

For women entrepreneurs and SMEs, circular transition does not always require a complete redesign of the business from the beginning. It can start with practical changes, such as using more sustainable materials, reducing production waste, introducing repair services, offering refill options, engaging customers in take-back schemes, or working with partners to reuse by-products.

Women entrepreneurs often operate in sectors where circular economy opportunities are highly relevant, such as fashion, textiles, cosmetics, packaging, food, tourism, crafts, education, retail, household products and creative industries. Many of these sectors face challenges related to waste, material use, packaging, customer behaviour, and sustainability communication.

Circular business models can help companies reduce dependence on virgin materials, lower waste and resource costs, create new services around repair or reuse, build stronger customer relationships, differentiate their products, access new partnerships and communicate their environmental and social value more clearly.

At the same time, many companies face barriers when trying to apply circular economy principles. These may include limited technical knowledge, lack of access to sustainable materials, insufficient infrastructure for reuse or return systems, limited digital skills, weak customer awareness, and lack of supportive partnerships.

This is why circular business model innovation is not only about environmental improvement. It is also about making businesses more resilient, visible, collaborative and better prepared for future markets.

Digital solutions and smart technologies can support this transition by making circular business models easier to apply, manage and scale. They help companies collect

information, track materials, improve logistics, communicate with customers and measure impact.

In circular business models, products and materials often move through several cycles. They may be returned, repaired, reused, refilled, rented, refurbished or recycled. Managing these flows can be difficult without reliable information. Digital tools can help companies understand where products are, how often they are used, when they need maintenance, and what happens to them after use.

Digital solutions can support circular transition in several practical ways:

Circular need	Possible digital support
Product transparency	QR codes, digital product passports, sustainability labels
Material traceability	RFID, NFC, blockchain, supplier databases
Reuse and return systems	customer apps, deposit tracking, return reminders
Production efficiency	digital dashboards, ERP tools, AI-based planning
Resource monitoring	IoT sensors, material flow tracking, smart databases
Customer engagement	gamification, online platforms, feedback tools
Impact communication	impact dashboards, CO ₂ and waste-saving calculators
Market access	digital marketplaces, matchmaking platforms, e-commerce tools

Digitalisation does not need to start with advanced or expensive technologies. For many SMEs, the first step can be simple: using QR codes to share product information, spreadsheets to monitor returns, online forms to collect customer feedback, or social media to communicate circular value. More advanced companies may later adopt digital product passports, AI forecasting, IoT sensors, blockchain verification or integrated data dashboards.

The key message is simple: every digital tool should answer a clear circular question - Where is the product? What is it made of? Is it returned, repaired or reused? What impact has it created? If a tool does not answer such a question, it is not yet needed. They should help solve a real problem, such as reducing waste, improving traceability, managing returns, engaging customers or measuring impact.

Circular and digital innovation can also create new business opportunities. Instead of relying only on one-time product sales, companies can develop additional revenue streams based on services, access, reuse, repair, data, education or partnerships.

Examples include:

- selling durable or reusable products;
- offering repair, upgrade or customisation services;

- introducing rental, leasing or product-as-a-service models;
- creating subscription or refill models;
- using deposit-return or take-back systems;
- offering workshops, training or co-creation experiences;
- licensing designs, processes or digital solutions;
- generating revenue from digital platforms or marketplace commissions;
- building partnerships with public institutions, companies or sustainability programmes.

Digital tools can strengthen these revenue streams by making them easier to manage. A subscription model may need automated reminders and customer data. A reusable packaging model may need tracking. A repair service may need a booking system. A circular marketplace may need digital matching. An impact-based business model may need reliable data to show results.

In this way, circularity and digitalisation work together. Circularity creates new ways to generate value, while digital tools help organise, communicate and scale that value.

3. Methodological basis of the Toolkit

The toolkit was developed on the basis of the practical work carried out within the WE.Circular project. It brings together the six circular business models, company scenarios from the co-creation process, examples from Innovation Contest finalists, inputs from project partners, and feedback received during the peer-review process.

The purpose was not to create a theoretical or academic classification of circular business models. The aim was to transform project experience into practical guidance that can be used by companies, trainers, mentors and business support organisations.

The toolkit does not present participating companies as individual case studies. Instead, their experience was used to identify common challenges, needs and possible solutions. These common patterns were organised into six circular business model types:

1. **Circular Design Accelerator**
2. **Resource Champions**
3. **Production Optimizers**

4. **Smart Digital Enablers**
5. **Market Educators**
6. **Collaborative Ecosystems**

Each model presents a different way in which companies can approach circular economy transition. Some models focus on product design, resource efficiency or production systems. Others focus on digital tools, market education or collaboration with partners.

The models are not fixed formulas. A company may use one model, combine elements from several models, or adapt the proposed ideas to its own sector, size, market, resources and level of development.

Each model is presented in a simple and comparable way, covering:

- what the model is about;
- which challenges it addresses;
- who it is useful for;
- what actions can be taken;
- how digital tools and smart technologies can support it;
- what partners may be needed;
- what revenue streams may be possible;
- what impact can be expected;
- short examples inspired by WE.Circular experience.

This structure was chosen to make the toolkit easy to read and practical to use. Companies can use it to identify ideas that fit their own situation. Trainers and mentors can use it as a basis for workshops, discussions or advisory sessions. Support organisations can use it to guide companies in exploring circular economy opportunities.

The toolkit therefore offers a flexible starting point for moving from general circular economy ideas to more concrete business model options and practical first steps.

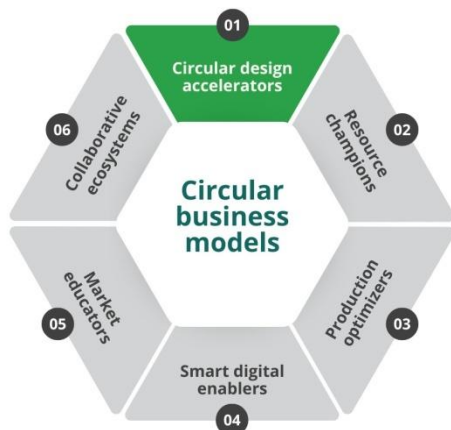
4. Circular business model pathways

The WE.Circular project developed six circular business model pathways that show different ways in which companies can move towards circular, resource-efficient and digitally supported business practices.

Each pathway focuses on a specific entry point for circular transition. Some companies may need to redesign products, others may need to improve resource use, strengthen production systems, introduce digital tools, educate customers, or build stronger partnerships. The pathways are not rigid models. They can be adapted to the company's sector, size, resources and readiness level.

In practice, a company may follow one pathway or combine elements from several pathways. The most important starting point is to identify the main challenge the company wants to address and then select the pathway that offers the most relevant ideas and actions. Companies may enter circular transition from different starting points, such as reducing costs, responding to customer expectations, improving resource efficiency, strengthening sustainability value, preparing for future market requirements, or differentiating their products and services. The six pathways therefore offer different entry points that can be adapted to the company's motivation, sector, readiness and available resources.

4.1 Circular business model No 1 - Circular Design Accelerators



The **Circular Design Accelerator** pathway supports companies that want to redesign their products, services or customer experience according to circular economy principles. It is especially relevant for businesses whose products are difficult to repair, reuse, disassemble, refill, return or recycle.

This pathway helps companies move circularity to the beginning of the design process. Instead of treating waste reduction or reuse as an additional activity, companies are encouraged to design products and services with longer life, easier maintenance, better material choices and clearer end-of-life options. Successful circular design also depends on understanding how customers use, maintain, return, repair or reuse products in practice. Customer participation and feedback can therefore become an important part of the design process.

The pathway is relevant for companies producing garments, accessories, packaging, décor, furniture, cosmetics, hospitality products, craft products or other physical goods. It can also be useful for designers, product developers, trainers and support organisations working with companies on sustainable product development.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- redesigning products for durability, modularity and repairability;
- using mono-material or easier-to-separate components;
- introducing repair, rental, reuse, refill or take-back services;
- involving customers in repair, care, customisation or return processes;
- communicating the circular value of products more clearly;
- using data to understand product performance, customer behaviour and environmental impact.

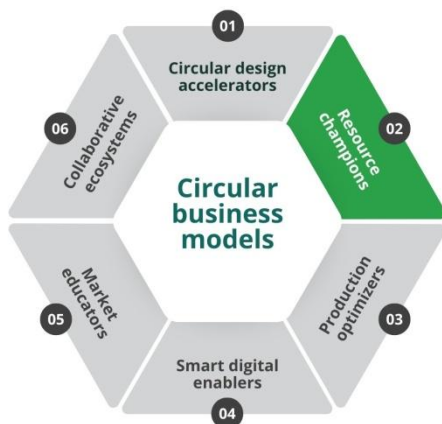
Digital tools can support this pathway in both simple and advanced ways. At an early stage, companies can use QR codes, product labels, customer feedback forms, repair logs or spreadsheets. More advanced companies may introduce digital product passports, lifecycle dashboards, traceability tools or data systems to monitor repairs, returns, material use and environmental impact. For smaller companies, simple tracking and communication tools, such as product labels, QR codes, repair logs, customer feedback forms or basic spreadsheets, may already support meaningful circular improvements without requiring advanced digital infrastructure.

Possible partners include sustainable material suppliers, designers, repair actors, reuse centres, logistics providers, certification bodies, digital service providers, universities, training organisations and municipalities.

This pathway can create value through sales of circular products, repair and customisation services, rental or subscription models, take-back schemes, workshops, licensing of designs or patterns, and impact-related services.

The expected impact includes reduced material waste, longer product lifetimes, stronger customer engagement, new circular services and better communication of environmental and social value. The Circular Design Accelerator model is built around redesign for circularity, lifecycle thinking, customer participation, communication of circular value and data-informed planning. Choose this pathway when your main barrier is product or service design: for example when items are difficult to repair, reuse, disassemble, refill or recycle, or when the circular value of the product is not clear and visible to the customer.

4.2 Circular business model No 2 - Resource Champions



The **Resource Champions** pathway supports companies that want to use materials more efficiently, reduce waste and increase the value of resources across their business. It is especially relevant for companies that depend on raw materials, generate production waste, use recycled or bio-based inputs, or transform waste into new products.

This pathway focuses on resource loops. It helps companies secure sustainable inputs, improve production efficiency, reduce dependence on virgin materials, and strengthen collection, reuse or recovery systems. Where possible, local sourcing, regional material loops and shorter supply chains can further strengthen resource security, traceability and resilience.

The pathway is relevant for manufacturers, packaging producers, textile and fashion businesses, recycling and upcycling initiatives, waste-to-product companies, social enterprises, and SMEs that need to scale circular production.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- mapping current material use and waste streams;
- identifying recycled, bio-based, local or certified input sources;
- improving material efficiency in production;
- testing sustainable materials before scaling;
- reducing production waste;
- setting up collection, take-back or reuse systems;
- preparing for certification, quality control and investment readiness, including simple indicators that show circular, business and environmental value.

Digital tools can support this pathway through material tracking, supplier databases, resource dashboards, IoT sensors, smart collection systems, production monitoring tools and digital platforms for by-product exchange. For companies at an early stage, a simple material log, supplier list or waste tracking sheet can already be useful.

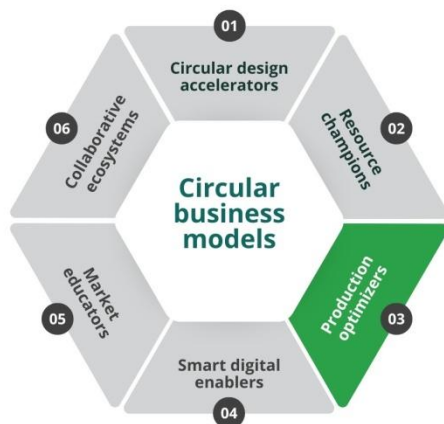
Possible partners include material suppliers, recyclers, agricultural producers, waste management companies, logistics providers, laboratories, certification bodies, technology providers, public institutions, investors and business support organisations.

This pathway can create value through sales of circular products, product-as-a-service models, deposit-return or take-back programmes, workshops, licensing, franchising, sponsorships, grants and funded pilot projects.

The expected impact includes reduced use of virgin materials, lower waste, better resource efficiency, stronger supply chains, new value from by-products and improved investment readiness. The Resource Champions model focuses on securing sustainable inputs, optimising processes and logistics, engaging circular participation and strengthening investment readiness.

Choose this pathway when the main barrier is related to materials and resource use - for example, when the company depends heavily on raw materials, generates production waste, has unstable access to sustainable inputs, or wants to turn leftovers, by-products or waste streams into new value.

4.3 Circular business model No 3 – Production Optimizers



The **Production Optimizers** pathway supports companies that need to improve their production, packaging, refill, return or logistics systems in order to operate more circularly. It is especially relevant for companies that want more control over how products are made, packed, delivered, returned, cleaned, refilled or reused.

This pathway focuses on the operational side of circularity. A circular idea can only work if the production and logistics system can support it. For example, reusable packaging requires collection, cleaning, storage, redistribution and customer participation. Subscription or refill models also need reliable planning, customer communication and supply chain coordination.

The pathway is relevant for companies in household care, cosmetics, food and beverages, personal care, packaging-intensive sectors, refill businesses, subscription-based models and companies planning to build or improve production infrastructure.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- strengthening production and logistics infrastructure;
- preparing technical and operational specifications;
- testing returnable or refillable packaging;
- assessing cleaning, storage and transport needs;
- introducing customer feedback loops;
- improving subscription or refill systems;
- building distribution and retail partnerships;
- testing circular operations before larger investments.

Digital tools can support this pathway through refill reminders, subscription management tools, packaging tracking, digital product passports, IoT-based return monitoring, demand forecasting, customer feedback systems and logistics management tools.

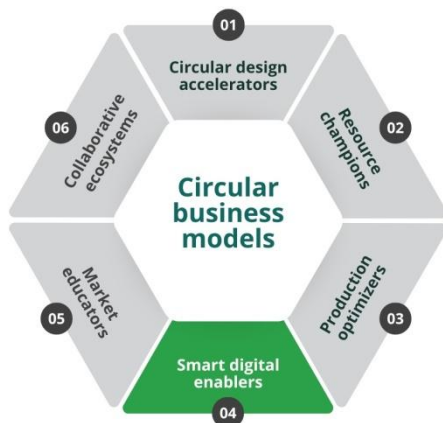
Possible partners include suppliers, packaging designers, logistics providers, cleaning service providers, architects, sustainable design studios, eco-brands, retailers, municipalities, investors, innovation hubs and education partners.

This pathway can create value through subscription services, one-time e-commerce sales, B2B partnerships, corporate CSR packages, deposit-return systems and packaging-related service fees.

The expected impact includes reduced packaging waste, more efficient logistics, stronger control over product quality, recurring revenue, customer loyalty and better readiness for scaling. The Production Optimizers model is built around strengthening production and logistics infrastructure, implementing returnable packaging systems, educating customers and expanding product lines or markets.

Choose this pathway when the main barrier is related to production, packaging or logistics — for example, when the company wants to introduce refill, return, reusable packaging, subscription or circular delivery systems, but needs to clarify the operational requirements before scaling.

4.4 Circular business model No 4 – Smart Digital Enablers



The **Smart Digital Enablers** pathway supports companies that want to use digital tools to make circular practices more transparent, measurable, efficient and scalable. It is relevant for companies that already use digital tools, as well as for those that want to introduce simple digital solutions step by step.

This pathway focuses on the role of technology in circular transition. Digital tools can help companies track products, monitor materials, manage returns, analyse data, improve logistics, communicate impact and engage customers.

The pathway is relevant for digital platforms, retailers, manufacturers, circular service providers, reuse and repair services, tourism platforms, food upcycling initiatives, fashion tech solutions and companies working with product-as-a-service, refill, rental or marketplace models.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- assessing digital readiness;
- identifying one or two priority digital use cases;
- improving platform integration;
- collecting and analysing operational or customer data;
- introducing lifecycle tracking;
- using QR, RFID or NFC tags;
- developing dashboards;
- testing AI-supported tools;
- improving digital customer engagement;
- scaling digital solutions gradually.

Digital tools under this pathway may include digital product passports, QR codes, RFID and NFC tags, IoT sensors, AI-based forecasting, smart databases, dashboards, API integrations, digital marketplaces, gamified customer apps and transparency pages.

The pathway should be applied gradually. Companies with low digital maturity may start with simple data collection, QR codes or basic dashboards. Companies with medium maturity can connect systems and improve analytics. More advanced companies may introduce AI, blockchain, predictive tools or integrated platforms. Many SMEs may initially lack advanced digital skills, internal technical capacity or the resources to invest in complex systems. For this reason, accessible, low-cost and modular digital solutions should be prioritised in the early stages. More advanced tools can be introduced gradually when there is a clear circular purpose, reliable data and suitable partner support.

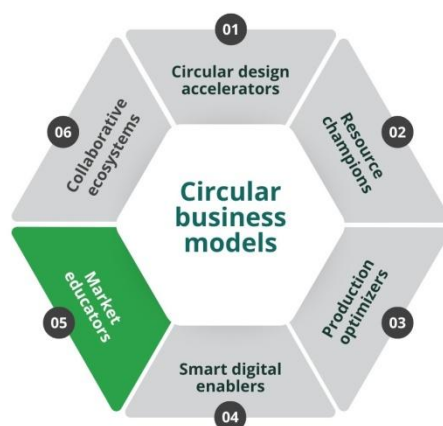
Possible partners include digital developers, AI experts, cybersecurity experts, UX/UI designers, technology transfer organisations, logistics providers, marketplaces, municipalities, sustainability organisations, financial institutions and sector associations.

This pathway can create value through software-as-a-service, platform subscriptions, product-as-a-service, marketplace commissions, consulting, implementation services, data insights, training, certification support and digital service packages.

The expected impact includes better traceability, reduced waste, improved decision-making, stronger customer engagement, more credible impact communication and new digital revenue opportunities. The Smart Digital Enablers model focuses on traceability, lifecycle data, digital product passports, IoT sensing, data analytics, platform integration and customer engagement.

Choose this pathway when the main barrier is related to data, transparency, traceability or digital integration — for example, when the company needs to track products or materials, reduce returns, manage circular flows, improve customer engagement, measure impact or scale a circular solution through digital tools.

4.5 Circular business model No 5 – Market Educators



The **Market Educators** pathway supports companies that need to increase awareness, trust and demand for circular products and services. It is especially relevant when customers do not understand the value of circular solutions, doubt sustainability claims, or are not yet motivated to change their behaviour.

This pathway focuses on communication, education and trust-building. Many circular products and services fail not because the solution is weak, but because customers do not clearly see why it matters, how it works, or why it is worth choosing. Transparent communication and verifiable claims are important for maintaining customer trust and avoiding perceptions of greenwashing. Companies should be able to explain their circular value in a way that is clear, credible and easy for customers to understand.

The pathway is relevant for companies in retail, fashion, crafts, education, community initiatives, sustainable products, upcycling, reuse, biodiversity, hospitality and local production. It is also useful for trainers and support organisations that help companies communicate their circular value.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- launching awareness campaigns;
- organising workshops, trainings or demonstrations;
- developing storytelling and branding around circular value;
- using product stories, labels or QR codes;
- creating educational materials, videos or guides;
- collecting customer feedback;
- building trust through transparent and proof-based communication;
- working with partners that can increase credibility and outreach.

Digital tools can support this pathway through websites, landing pages, social media campaigns, short videos, QR-based product stories, e-learning materials, digital guides, online feedback tools, impact calculators, gamified campaigns and customer communities. Companies may also benefit from building communities of users and supporters who participate through feedback, co-creation, repair culture, product return, peer advocacy or participation in awareness activities.

Possible partners include NGOs, schools, universities, municipalities, community organisations, communication agencies, influencers, digital media partners, suppliers, certification bodies and professional experts.

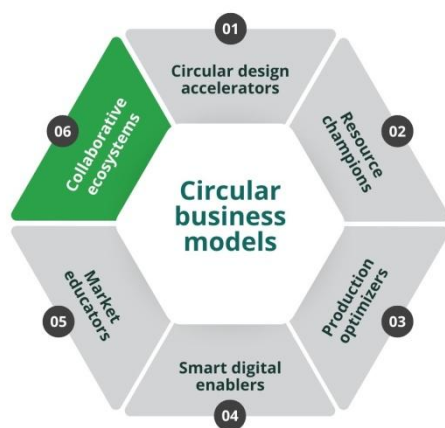
This pathway can create value through circular product sales, workshops, training services, educational materials, sponsorships, public programmes, memberships, subscriptions and partnership-based activities.

The expected impact includes stronger customer awareness, increased trust, better market visibility, higher demand for circular products, community engagement and

more informed consumption choices. The Market Educators model focuses on awareness campaigns, education and training, storytelling, demonstration, market trust and partnership networks.

Choose this pathway when the main barrier is related to market awareness, trust or customer behaviour — for example, when customers do not understand the value of circular products, are not ready to participate in reuse or return systems, or need clearer proof of the environmental and social benefits.

4.6 Circular business model No 6 – Collaborative Ecosystems



The **Collaborative Ecosystems** pathway supports companies that cannot implement circular solutions alone and need partnerships, shared resources or stronger networks. It is especially relevant for SMEs with limited capacity, space, knowledge, materials, infrastructure or market access.

This pathway is based on the idea that circular value can be created through cooperation.

Companies can connect with suppliers, customers, public institutions, repair actors, educational organisations, communities, other SMEs and larger companies to share resources, knowledge, infrastructure and market opportunities. Locally embedded cooperation can also help keep materials, services, knowledge and value creation within regional ecosystems. This can strengthen circular solutions while improving access to practical support, visibility and shared resources for SMEs.

The pathway is relevant for companies that need stable access to recycled materials, shared tools or workspaces, local suppliers, repair and reuse partners, customer communities, educational partners or support from municipalities and business networks.

Typical actions under this pathway include:

- using shared resources such as tools, space, logistics or equipment;
- joining networks, accelerators, chambers or innovation hubs;
- testing small pilot projects with partners;
- cooperating with local suppliers, makers or service providers;

- involving customers in circular activities;
- organising repair, reuse or upcycling events;
- building trust through transparency and shared values;
- gradually formalising cooperation where useful.

Digital tools can support this pathway through online communities, matchmaking platforms, shared databases, digital knowledge hubs, joint promotion channels, marketplace platforms and simple tools for coordinating shared resources or events.

Possible partners include suppliers, manufacturers, local craftsmen, repair actors, market and communication partners, educational institutions, municipalities, NGOs, community groups, chambers, innovation hubs and financial institutions.

This pathway can create value through product sales, product rental, grants, workshops, repair cafés, paid alerts or newsletters, co-branded offers, shared services and cooperation-based projects.

The expected impact includes better access to materials and knowledge, stronger local circular ecosystems, reduced waste through reuse and repair, higher customer engagement, shared costs and stronger market visibility. The Collaborative Ecosystems model focuses on connecting, sharing, co-creating and capturing value across a network of partners.

Choose this pathway when the main barrier is related to limited access to partners, materials, knowledge, and infrastructure or market visibility— for example, when the company cannot implement a circular solution alone and needs cooperation, shared resources or community participation to make the model work.

5. Cross-cutting digital solutions and smart technologies

Digital solutions and smart technologies appear across all six circular business model pathways. They are not a separate goal, but practical enablers that can help companies make circular practices easier to manage, monitor, communicate and scale.

For many SMEs, digitalisation can start with simple and low-cost tools, such as QR codes, spreadsheets, online forms, customer databases, social media, or basic dashboards. More advanced solutions, such as digital product passports, AI, IoT sensors or integrated platforms, can be introduced gradually when the company has the

necessary data, skills, partners and financial capacity. Digitalisation should remain proportionate to the company's needs and capacity. A simple tool that is used regularly and supports a clear circular action is often more valuable than an advanced system that is costly, difficult to maintain or not yet connected to the company's business model.

The most important principle is that each digital tool should respond to a clear business need. It should help the company solve a real problem, such as improving traceability, reducing waste, managing returns, communicating impact, engaging customers, coordinating partners or measuring results.

5.1 Traceability and digital product passports

Traceability tools help companies follow products, materials or components throughout their lifecycle. They make it easier to understand where materials come from, how products are used, whether they are repaired or returned, and what happens to them after use.

For circular business models, traceability is especially important because products and materials often pass through several cycles. They may be reused, repaired, refilled, rented, refurbished or recycled. Without reliable information, it is difficult to manage these flows or communicate their value.

Simple traceability tools may include QR codes, product labels, batch numbers, online product stories or basic supplier records. More advanced tools may include RFID or NFC tags, blockchain-based verification systems, lifecycle tracking platforms and digital product passports.

Digital product passports can provide structured information about a product, such as materials, origin, repair instructions, environmental data, certifications, reuse options or end-of-life guidance. They can support transparency, compliance and customer trust. Digital product passports are also becoming increasingly relevant in the European policy and market context. For SMEs, this does not mean that complex systems must be introduced immediately. A practical first step can be to organise basic product information in a structured way, so that data on materials, origin, care, repair, reuse or recycling options can be communicated more clearly and upgraded over time.

Traceability and digital product passports are especially useful for:

- products made from recycled, bio-based or certified materials;
- reusable or refillable packaging;

- repairable or modular products;
- fashion, textile, furniture, cosmetics and packaging products;
- companies that need to prove sustainability claims;
- companies that want to make circular claims more transparent, verifiable and easier to understand for customers or partners;
- businesses preparing for future regulatory or market requirements.

For smaller companies, the first step does not need to be complex. A simple QR code leading to a webpage with product origin, materials, care instructions, repair options and return information can already improve transparency and customer engagement.

5.2 Data dashboards and impact measurement

Data dashboards help companies collect, organise and present information about their circular activities. They can be used internally for decision-making or externally to communicate results to customers, partners, investors and support organisations.

Impact measurement is important because circular business models often create value that is not immediately visible. A company may reduce waste, extend product life, avoid emissions, increase reuse, involve customers, create green skills or develop new partnerships. These results need to be tracked in a simple and understandable way.

Companies should start with a small number of practical indicators, usually three to five, that are easy to collect and useful for decision-making. These indicators can be grouped under material and waste results, customer participation, and business value. Examples include:

- number of repaired or returned products;
- kilograms of waste avoided or reused;
- share of recycled or bio-based materials;
- number of refill or reuse cycles;
- customer participation in return or repair schemes;
- number of workshop participants;
- repeat customers;
- estimated CO₂ savings;
- revenue from circular products or services.

Both quantitative and qualitative information can be useful. Numbers show scale and progress, while feedback from customers, partners or employees can help companies understand whether the circular action is practical, trusted and worth scaling. At an early stage, companies can use spreadsheets, Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, Airtable, Notion or simple monthly monitoring sheets. More advanced companies may use dashboards in Looker Studio, Power BI, Airtable interfaces, ERP systems or integrated impact reporting tools.

Dashboards are useful across all business model pathways. They can support product redesign, resource efficiency, production optimisation, digital services, market education and collaborative ecosystems. They also help companies make better decisions by showing what works, what needs improvement and where additional support is needed.

For trainers and mentors, simple impact indicators can be used during workshops or advisory sessions to help companies define what they want to measure before selecting digital tools.

5.3 AI and predictive tools

Artificial intelligence and predictive tools can help companies analyse data, identify patterns and make better decisions. In circular business models, AI can support planning, forecasting, matching, recommendations and process optimisation.

AI tools may be useful for:

- demand forecasting to avoid overproduction;
- product recommendation systems;
- sizing and fit tools that reduce returns;
- matching by-products with potential users;
- predicting when products need maintenance or replacement;
- optimising logistics routes;
- identifying customer behaviour patterns;
- supporting investor-project matching on digital platforms.

However, AI should not be seen as a starting point for every company. It usually requires good-quality data, technical skills and clear business logic. For many SMEs, it is better to begin with simple data collection and basic analysis before moving to AI-based tools.

A practical approach is to start with one question: What decision could be improved if the company had better data? For example, a fashion company may want to reduce returns, a food company may want to identify by-product opportunities, or a reusable packaging provider may want to predict demand and return rates.

AI and predictive tools are most relevant for companies with higher digital maturity or for companies working with digital partners. They can create strong value, but only when they are connected to a clear circular outcome, such as reducing waste, improving efficiency, increasing reuse or strengthening customer engagement.

5.4 IoT and smart monitoring

IoT, or Internet of Things, refers to connected devices and sensors that collect and share data. In circular business models, IoT can help companies monitor products, materials, equipment, containers, packaging or resource flows in real time.

IoT and smart monitoring can be useful for:

- tracking reusable packaging or containers;
- monitoring the condition of products during use;
- measuring fill levels in collection bins;
- improving waste collection routes;
- tracking equipment performance;
- monitoring energy, water or material use;
- supporting maintenance and repair planning;
- collecting data for impact measurement.

For example, a company operating a returnable packaging system may use tracking tags or sensors to understand how often packaging is returned, where losses occur, and how many reuse cycles are achieved. A waste-to-resource company may use smart collection systems to improve pickup routes and reduce unnecessary transport.

IoT tools are usually more advanced and may require investment, technical support and data management capacity. Therefore, SMEs should first assess whether the expected benefit justifies the cost and complexity. In many cases, a pilot with one product line, one location or one partner can help test whether smart monitoring is useful before scaling.

The value of IoT lies in making circular flows more visible and manageable. It helps companies move from assumptions to real operational data.

5.5 Digital customer engagement

Customer participation is essential for many circular business models. Reuse, repair, refill, rental, return and take-back systems depend on customers understanding the process and being motivated to participate.

Digital tools can make this easier by providing information, reminders, incentives and feedback. They can also help companies explain their circular value in a simple and attractive way.

Digital customer engagement should be designed around the customer journey. The tool or message should make it easier for customers to understand what they need to do, why their participation matters and what benefit they receive from taking part in a circular action.

Digital customer engagement tools may include:

- QR codes linking to product stories or repair instructions;
- refill or return reminders;
- loyalty points and reward systems;
- customer apps;
- gamified challenges;
- online feedback forms;
- social media campaigns;
- newsletters;
- digital learning materials;
- impact calculators;
- short videos and storytelling pages.

The selected tools should be accessible for different customer profiles and should not create additional complexity. For example, a QR code, reminder message or short feedback form may be more effective than a complex app if it is easier for customers to use regularly. These tools are especially relevant for the Circular Design Accelerator, Production Optimizers, Smart Digital Enablers and Market Educators pathways. They can help customers understand how to care for a product, return packaging, participate

in a repair event, choose a refill option, or see the environmental impact of their actions.

For SMEs, customer engagement should remain simple and user-friendly. A circular system will not work if participation is too complicated. Digital tools should make the customer journey easier, support behaviour change and help customers see the value of their participation.

A good starting point is to ask: What does the customer need to know or do to participate in the circular model? The answer can guide the choice of tool, message and communication channel.

5.6 Digital platforms and marketplaces

Digital platforms and marketplaces can connect different actors in circular value chains. They can help companies find materials, customers, partners, investors, repair services, suppliers, by-product users or educational communities.

Platforms are especially useful when circular solutions depend on exchange and cooperation. For example, one company's waste or by-product may become another company's resource. A repair service may need to connect with customers. A marketplace may help sell reused, upcycled or sustainable products. A funding platform may connect circular projects with investors.

Digital platforms and marketplaces can support:

- by-product exchange;
- second-hand and resale models;
- repair and reuse services;
- circular product marketplaces;
- supplier and recycler matchmaking;
- sustainable tourism platforms;
- green investment platforms;
- educational and community exchange;
- shared resource or equipment use.

For companies, platforms can create new market access and visibility. For trainers and support organisations, they can be used to connect SMEs with partners, promote circular offers, or support ecosystem-building.

However, platforms need trust, clear rules, good user experience and active participation. A platform is useful only if the right actors use it and if transactions, information or cooperation are easy to manage.

Companies can start by using existing platforms before developing their own. If a new platform is needed, it should begin with a clear purpose, a defined user group and a small pilot community. This helps avoid overinvestment and ensures that the platform responds to a real circular need.

6. Step-by-step implementation guide

This chapter helps companies, trainers and mentors use the circular business model pathways in practice. The Annexes provide practical worksheets that follow this same sequence, so the steps below can be used as a guided session with one printable tool per step. It is designed as a simple decision guide: first identify the company's main situation, then choose the most relevant pathway, select practical actions, add suitable tools, involve partners and measure results.

The process does not need to be followed in a rigid way. Some companies may already have ongoing circular activities or partnerships and therefore enter the process at a later step, while others may begin with basic awareness and diagnosis. A company may move back and forth between the steps. The aim is to support practical decision-making and help companies move from general circular economy ideas to concrete first actions.

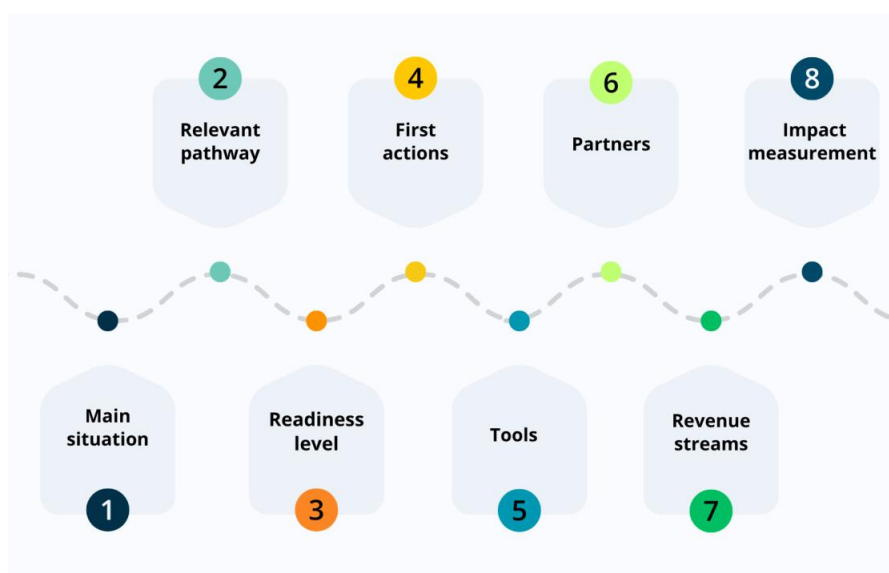


Figure 0-1: implementation logic for applying circular business model pathways, own illustration

The implementation logic follows a simple sequence, starting from the company's current situation and moving gradually towards action and impact measurement. The process helps users first understand the main circular challenge, then select the most relevant pathway, assess readiness, choose suitable actions and tools, identify partners, define possible revenue streams and finally measure results. This sequence can be used flexibly and adapted to the specific needs, capacity and maturity of each company. The sequence can be used for both short-term and long-term planning. In the short term, it helps identify one or two feasible actions to test. In the longer term, it can support broader business model development, partnership building and scaling of circular practices.

6.1 Diagnose the current business model

The first step is to understand where the company stands now. This does not require a complex analysis. A short internal discussion, a mentoring session or a simple mapping exercise can be enough.

The company should look at its products, services, materials, production process, customers, partners, costs and revenue streams. The aim is to identify where circular opportunities or problems already exist.

Useful guiding questions include:

- ✓ Which materials, products or processes generate the most waste?
- ✓ Which products are difficult to repair, reuse, refill, return or recycle?
- ✓ Where could resources, by-products or leftovers be used more efficiently?
- ✓ What prevents customers from participating in circular actions, such as repair, return, reuse or refill?
- ✓ Which partners, tools or skills are missing for the company to move forward?
- ✓ How could the circular action create value for the company and its customers?

At this stage, the company should answer one main question:

What is the most important barrier that prevents the business from becoming more circular?

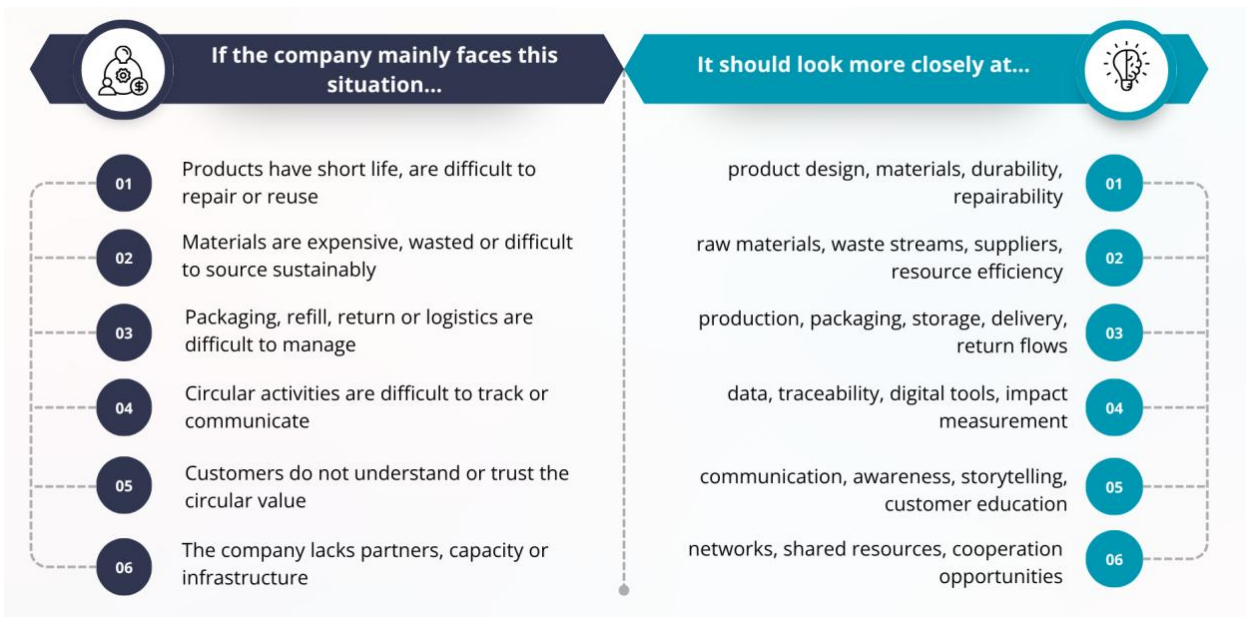


Figure 0-2: Initial diagnosis of the company's circular business model needs, own illustration

6.2 Select the most relevant pathway

After identifying the main situation, the company can choose the pathway that best fits its needs.

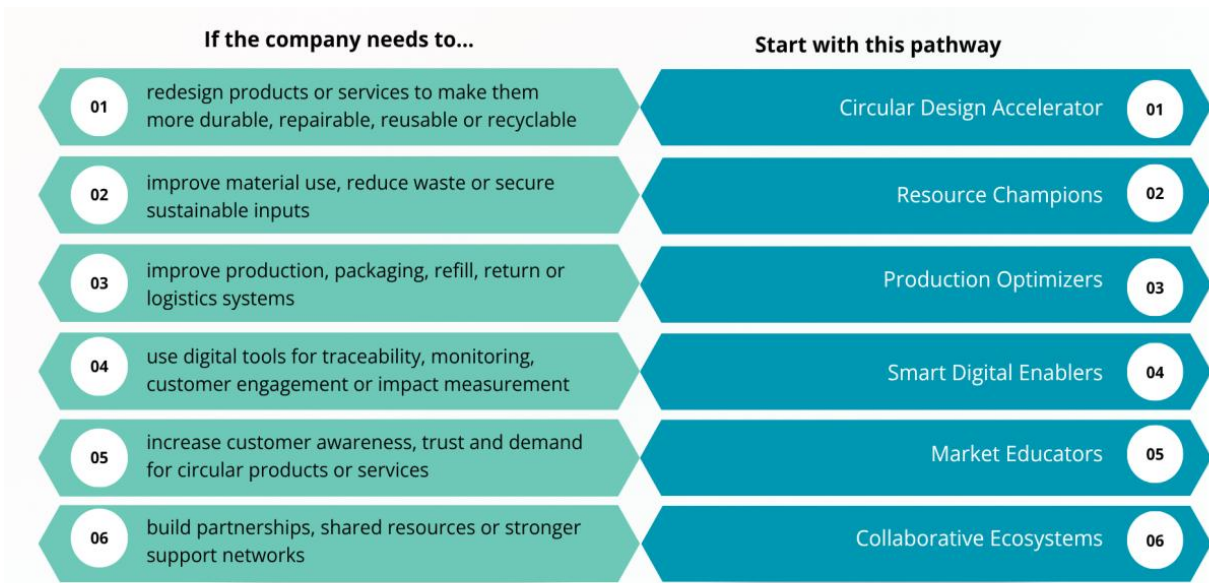


Figure 0-3: Selection of the most relevant circular business model pathway, own illustration

A company may start with one pathway and later combine it with others. For example, a reusable packaging solution may need the **Production Optimizers** pathway first, but also

digital tracking from **Smart Digital Enablers** and communication support from **Market Educators**.

The selected pathway should respond to the company's real business need, not only to a general sustainability ambition.

6.3 Assess circular and digital readiness

Before choosing actions, the company should assess how ready it is to apply the selected pathway. Readiness shows whether the company should start with basic actions, pilot activities or more advanced implementation.

Readiness level	What it usually means	Recommended approach
01 Low readiness	The company is at an early stage and has limited circular practices, partnerships, data or digital tools	Start with one small, low-cost action
02 Medium readiness	The company already applies some circular elements but needs better systems, partners, communication or digital tools	Test a pilot action and strengthen missing elements
03 High readiness	The company already has relevant practices, partners, tools or customer engagement in place	Scale, improve and combine several actions

Figure 0-4: Assessment of circular and digital readiness, own illustration

Digital readiness should also be considered. Not every company needs advanced technologies from the beginning.

Digital readiness	Suitable starting point
BASIC	spreadsheets, QR codes, online forms, social media, simple customer lists
INTERMEDIATE	dashboards, digital tracking, customer databases, simple automation
ADVANCED	digital product passports, IoT, AI tools, integrated platforms, predictive analytics

Figure 0-5: Digital readiness and suitable starting points, own illustration

The selected digital tool should match the company's real capacity. A simple tool that is used regularly is more valuable than an advanced system that is too difficult to maintain.

6.4 Choose actions and tools

Once the pathway and readiness level are clear, the company can choose practical actions. It is better to start with one or two actions that are realistic and easy to test.

	Pathway	Possible first actions	Possible supporting tools
01	Circular Design Accelerator	redesign one product; improve reparability; test take-back or reuse options	Appealing to all creates a weak brand perception.
02	Resource Champions	map materials and waste; test one recycled or bio-based input; improve resource efficiency	material log, supplier database, waste tracking sheet
03	Production Optimizers	test one reusable packaging option; improve refill or return flow; assess logistics needs	return tracking sheet, subscription tool, packaging flow map
04	Smart Digital Enablers	introduce traceability; collect data; test a dashboard or simple tracking tool	QR code, dashboard, database, digital product passport
05	Market Educators	create a clearer circular message; launch an awareness activity; test customer education	social media, landing page, QR story, feedback form
06	Collaborative Ecosystems	identify one useful partner; test a joint activity; join a network or shared initiative	partner map, shared calendar, online community, matchmaking platform

Figure 0-6: First actions and supporting tools by circular business model pathway, own illustration

The action should be specific. For example, instead of “become more circular”, the company can define an action such as “test a return option for one packaging type with 20 customers” or “create a QR code with product care and repair information”.

This makes the action easier to implement, monitor and improve.

Examples of small, testable actions include: testing a return option for one packaging type with a limited group of customers; creating a QR code with product care, repair or reuse information for one product; mapping textile or material leftovers from one

production process and identifying one possible reuse option; or collecting customer feedback on a refill, repair or take-back idea before wider implementation.

6.5 Build partnerships

Many circular actions require support from other actors. Partnerships can help companies to access materials, knowledge, technology, logistics, customers, finance or visibility.

Partnership building does not need to start with formal agreements. Companies can begin with small, practical cooperation and later develop it into a more structured partnership.

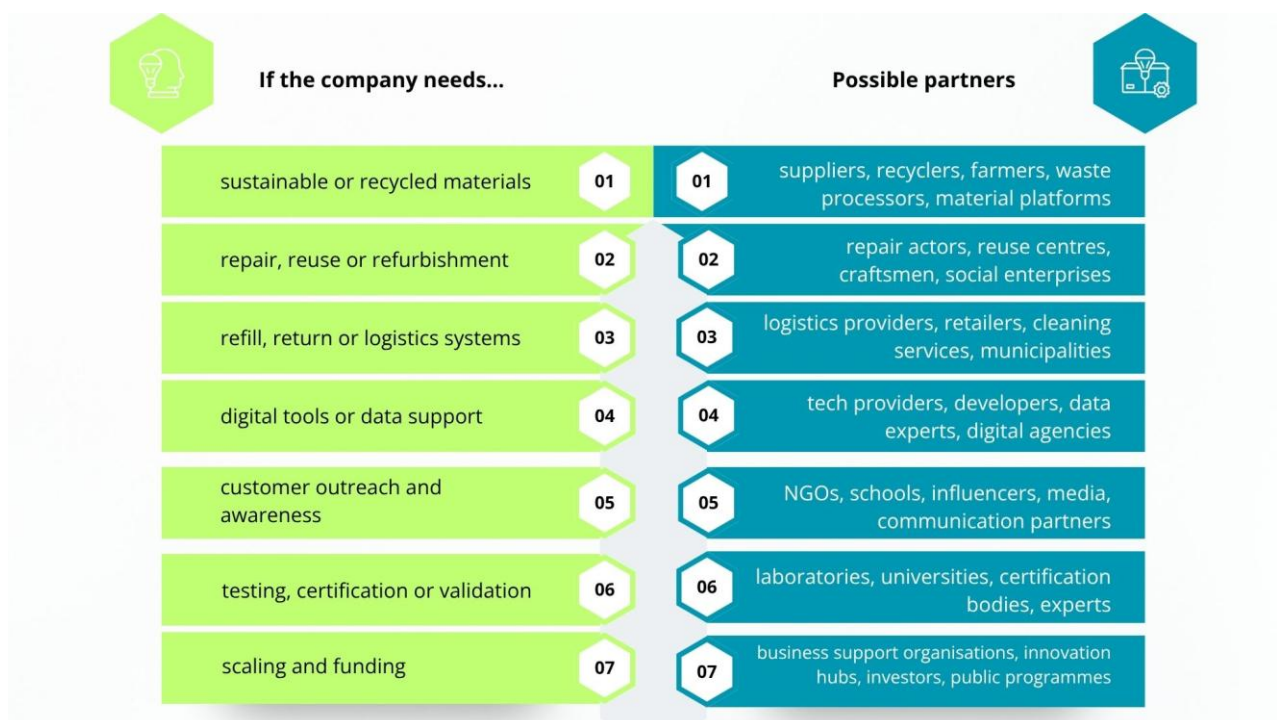


Figure 0-7: Partnership needs and possible partners for circular implementation, own illustration

Before scaling cooperation, companies should clarify:

- what each partner will contribute;
- what each partner will receive;
- who is responsible for what;
- how costs, benefits and risks will be shared;
- how the results of cooperation will be reviewed.

A small pilot activity is often the best way to test whether a partnership works.

6.6 Define revenue streams

Circular business models should also be financially viable. After selecting the pathway, actions, tools and partners, the company should consider how the circular model can create income or business value.

Business value can come in different forms. Some circular actions may generate direct income, such as repair services, workshops, rental, subscriptions or refill models. Others may create indirect value by reducing material costs, lowering waste, improving customer loyalty, strengthening brand differentiation, attracting partners or improving access to funding and support programmes.

Not every revenue stream should be introduced immediately. Companies can begin with the most realistic option and test whether customers or partners are willing to pay for it.

For example, a company may first offer a small repair service before creating a subscription model. A company running free awareness activities may later develop paid workshops or training programmes. A company testing reusable packaging may first use a deposit system before offering a full packaging-as-a-service model.

The key question is:

How can the circular action create value for the company, the customer and the environment?

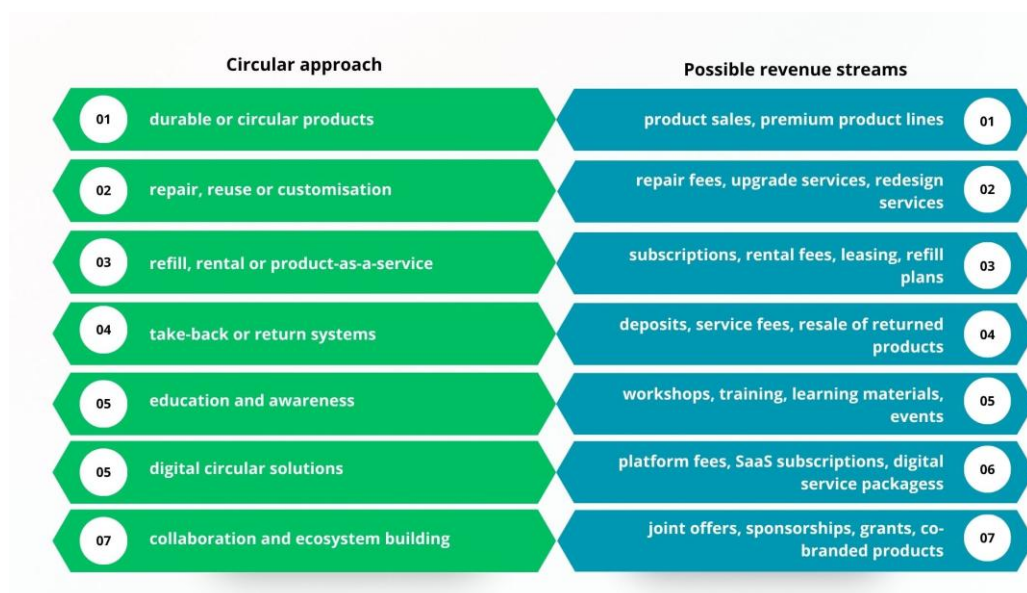


Figure 0-8: Circular approaches and possible revenue streams, own illustration

6.7 Measure impact

The final step is to measure whether the selected actions are working. Impact measurement does not need to be complex. Companies can start with a few simple indicators and improve the system over time.

Impact area	Possible indicators
Environmental impact	waste avoided, materials reused, packaging returned, CO ₂ savings, reduced virgin material use, number of repair or reuse cycles
Social impact	customers engaged, participants trained, workshops organised, community members involved, customer satisfaction, awareness raised
Economic impact	new revenue streams, repeat customers, cost savings, new partnerships, investment readiness, market expansion

A simple monthly monitoring sheet can be enough at the beginning:

Indicator	What to record?	Why is it useful?
Materials reused or waste avoided	kg, number of items or estimated volume	Shows environmental progress
Products repaired, returned, refilled or reused	number of products or cycles	Shows whether the circular action is being used
Customers participating	number of customers, workshop participants or feedback responses	Shows customer engagement
Revenue or cost savings from circular actions	income, avoided costs or new service revenue	Shows business value
Customer or partner feedback	short comments, satisfaction or repeated interest	Shows whether the action is practical and trusted

Companies do not need to measure everything from the beginning. It is better to start with a few indicators that are easy to update regularly and directly linked to the selected circular action. The company can track, for example:

- number of returned products;
- number of repaired or reused items;
- amount of reused or recycled materials;
- number of customers participating in circular activities;
- number of workshops or awareness activities;
- revenue from circular products or services;
- customer feedback.

The purpose of impact measurement is not only reporting. It should help companies understand what works, what needs improvement and what can be scaled. In addition to numerical indicators, companies may also collect qualitative feedback from customers, employees, partners or communities. This can help them better understand behavioural change, customer trust, user experience, practical barriers and the overall relevance of the circular action.

7. Practical examples from WE.Circular experience

The following examples illustrate how selected companies involved in the WE.Circular project applied different circular business model pathways. The examples are presented in a concise and non-confidential way. They do not provide full case studies, but show the scope of the companies' activities, the change they aimed to achieve, and the way the selected pathway supported their circular transition.

7.1 Magbago

Pathway illustrated: Circular Design Accelerator

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sector: Sustainable fashion and textiles

MAGBAGO is a sustainable fashion brand working with eco-friendly and safe materials. Its activity is focused on the design and production of fashion items that combine modern aesthetics with responsible production, reduced waste and longer product life.

The targeted change was to move from already existing sustainable practices towards a more structured circular design approach. The company aimed to better document how circularity is embedded in product design, how materials are used, how waste can be reduced during production, and how the circular value of the product can be explained to customers.



Within the WE.Circular experience, the company applied the Circular Design Accelerator pathway by focusing on one product and analysing its design, materials, production process and customer communication. Attention was given to material choice, efficient use of fabric, product durability, recyclability and circular value communication.

This example shows that circular design can begin with a focused product-level exercise. A company does not need to redesign its whole business at once. It can start by selecting one product, mapping its lifecycle, identifying where waste appears and improving how the circular value is communicated. The pilot confirmed that this type of structured product-level approach can help sustainable fashion companies make circularity more visible and easier to replicate.

Transferable lesson: *circular design becomes easier to apply when companies connect product design, material use, waste prevention and customer communication in one process.*

7.2 TUKA Wear

Pathway illustrated: Resource Champions

Country: Moldova

Sector: Sustainable fashion and textiles



TUKA Wear is a sustainable fashion brand working with eco-friendly materials and textile products. Its activity is linked to responsible production, more sustainable material choices and the creation of fashion

products with lower environmental impact.

The targeted change was to improve resource efficiency and move towards a more systematic circular production approach. The company wanted to reduce material losses, make better use of available textile resources, and identify how production leftovers could be transformed into additional products or value-added outputs.

The Resource Champions pathway helped the company to focus on material flows, sourcing stability, waste reduction and product diversification. The process supported the company in reviewing how materials are used, where losses occur and how leftovers can be reintegrated into production.

This example shows that resource efficiency is not only about reducing costs. It can also support product diversification, reduce waste and strengthen the company's identity as a circular brand. The pilot also highlighted that stable access to sustainable materials and reliable supplier relationships are important conditions for scaling circular production.

Transferable lesson: *companies can start by mapping their most important materials and identifying which leftovers, by-products or unused resources could become part of new products or services.*

7.3 EcoHaus

Pathway illustrated: Production Optimizers

Country: Czech Republic

Sector: Sustainable household products

EcoHaus is a sustainable household products brand focused on eco-friendly home care products and circular consumption. Its activity is connected to concentrated products, customer convenience and the reduction of unnecessary packaging and logistics impacts.

The targeted change was to strengthen the operational side of circularity. The company aimed to explore how packaging, fulfilment, logistics and future production systems could better support reuse, return and more circular product flows.

The Production Optimizers pathway helped EcoHaus to clarify the practical requirements for circular packaging and return systems. The process looked at packaging flows, customer participation, logistics needs, possible production infrastructure and the conditions needed before larger operational changes could be implemented.

This example is useful because it shows that circularity depends strongly on operational systems. A refill, return or reusable packaging model needs more than a good product idea. It also requires packaging design, storage, delivery, return flows, customer participation, handling procedures and suitable partners. The pilot helped define the next strategic steps rather than implementing a full circular logistics system immediately.

Transferable lesson: *before introducing a full circular packaging or return system, companies should test one small operational loop, assess customer willingness to participate and identify which partners are needed.*

7.4 SizeSense

Pathway illustrated: Smart Digital Enablers

Country: Bulgaria

Sector: Fashion technology and digital services

SizeSense is a digital solution for fashion e-commerce. Its activity focuses on improving size recommendations in online fashion retail by matching customer body measurements with garment specifications. The solution aims to reduce uncertainty in online shopping and lower the number of avoidable product returns.

The targeted change within WE.Circular project was to strengthen the company's digital architecture, scaling potential and circular impact positioning. The company wanted to move beyond a limited platform-based setup and make its solution more suitable for wider integration with fashion brands and retailers.

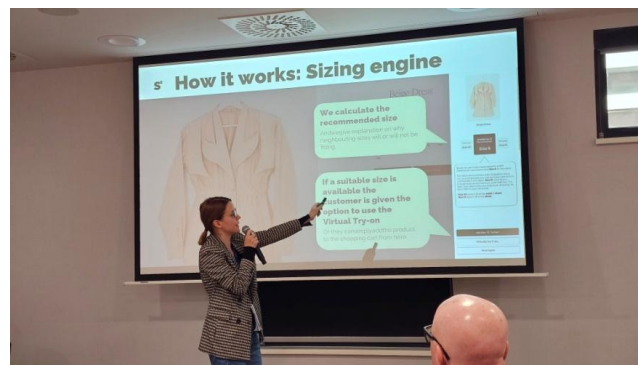


Photo 1: Presentation of SizeSense during the Pop-up Store event, Bratislava, Slovakia, 03.2026

The Smart Digital Enablers pathway supported the company in improving digital integration logic, strengthening AI-supported functionality and clarifying how reduced returns can be presented as a circular economy benefit. The company also worked on better communicating the environmental relevance of its solution, especially in relation to reduced logistics impacts and textile waste.

This example shows that digital tools can contribute to circular transition when they solve a specific business and sustainability problem. In this case, better fit recommendations can help reduce unnecessary transport, returns and waste linked to

wrong size choices. SizeSense operates as a SaaS solution using AI-based algorithms to match customer measurements with garment specifications. The pilot focused on API integration, AI optimisation and clearer positioning of the circular benefits — reduced returns, lower logistics impact and less textile waste.

Transferable lesson: *digitalisation should be linked to a clear circular purpose. A useful digital tool should help reduce waste, improve decisions, support traceability, engage customers or measure impact.*

7.5 Nagy Márta Upcycling

Pathway illustrated: Market Educators

Country: Hungary

Sector: Upcycled fashion and education

Nagy Márta Upcycling is a micro-enterprise working with discarded textiles and transforming them into new fashion products and accessories. Its activity combines upcycled product creation with educational formats that promote conscious consumption and textile waste reduction.

The targeted change was to strengthen market communication and customer understanding of the circular value behind the products. The company already had a circular product logic, but needed clearer brand positioning, stronger storytelling and more coherent presentation of its collections.

The Market Educators pathway helped the company focus on rebranding, communication style, product storytelling and workshop-based engagement. The approach supported the company in presenting upcycled products not only as handmade items, but as products with a story, environmental value and educational potential.

This example shows that circular products often need explanation. Customers may not immediately understand why an upcycled product is valuable, how it was made or what environmental benefit it creates. Storytelling, visual identity and direct engagement can therefore become part of the business model. The Hungary testing report confirms that



the pilot focused on brand repositioning, communication refinement, product storytelling and workshop-based activities.

Transferable lesson: *companies offering circular products should not rely only on the sustainability of the product itself. They also need clear, credible and engaging communication that helps customers understand and trust the circular value.*

7.6 SNOVÁ

Pathway illustrated: Collaborative Ecosystems

Country: Slovakia

Sector: Event and wedding decoration rental / creative services

SNOVÁ

SNOVÁ is a company working in the field of event and wedding decoration rental, with a focus on more sustainable alternatives to single-use or short-life event materials. Its activity is based on renting, reusing, maintaining and creatively adapting decoration items for different events.

The targeted change was to strengthen the collaborative dimension of the business model. For this type of activity, circularity depends not only on the company itself, but also on cooperation with event agencies, clients, suppliers, local producers and other service providers. The company needed to explore how stronger partnerships could support access to materials, shared logistics, customer awareness and broader promotion of sustainable event solutions.

SNOVÁ applied the Collaborative Ecosystems pathway by focusing on partnership building, customer mindset change and trust. The company explored how cooperation with local actors and event-related partners could help make sustainable decoration rental more visible, practical and attractive for customers.

This example shows that circular business models in the service sector often depend on the wider ecosystem around the company. A rental model can reduce waste and extend the life of products, but it also needs reliable partners, good coordination, customer understanding and clear communication of the benefits.

Transferable lesson: *collaborative ecosystems can help circular service companies grow by connecting them with partners who share similar values and can support materials, logistics, promotion, customer education or access to new markets.*

8. Annexes

Eight worksheets and reference cards designed to be used in mentoring sessions, workshops or internal company planning. Each tool supports one step of Chapter 6 (Step-by-step implementation guide).

How the tools map to Chapter 6

- Tool 1 — Self-Diagnosis → Step 6.1 (Diagnose the current business model)
- Tool 2 — Pathway Selection Matrix → Step 6.2 (Select the most relevant pathway)
- Tool 3 — Readiness Check → Step 6.3 (Assess circular and digital readiness)
- Tool 4 — Action Planning Canvas → Step 6.4 (Choose actions and tools)
- Tool 5 — Partner Mapping Worksheet → Step 6.5 (Build partnerships)
- Tool 6 — Revenue Stream Selector → Step 6.6 (Define revenue streams)
- Tool 7 — Monthly Impact Tracking Sheet → Step 6.7 (Measure impact)
- Tool 8 — Digital Tool Starter List → cross-cutting reference (Chapter 5)

8.1 Tool 1. Self-Diagnosis

Purpose: Identify where your biggest circular opportunities or gaps lie. Each question maps to one of the six pathways.

How to use: Tick Yes, Partial or No for each question. Count your No and Partial answers per pathway. The pathway(s) with the most gaps point to where to focus first.

#	Question	Yes	Partial	No	Pathway
1	Do you know the full material composition and origin of your main product or service input?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	RC
2	Have you mapped where production waste, off-cuts or by-products are generated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	RC
3	Are your products designed so they can be repaired, refilled, disassembled or recycled at end of life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	CDA
4	Do you offer customers a way to return, repair, refill or take back used products or packaging?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	CDA / PO
5	Do your production, packaging or logistics systems support reuse or returns (storage, cleaning,	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	PO

#	Question	Yes	Partial	No	Pathway
	redelivery)?				
6	Do you collect digital data on products, returns, customers or material flows in a structured way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	SDE
7	Do you use any digital tool (QR, app, platform, dashboard) to support a circular practice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	SDE
8	Can your customers clearly explain why your product is circular or sustainable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ME
9	Do you communicate your circular value through stories, labels, workshops or campaigns?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ME
10	Do you cooperate regularly with suppliers, peers, repair actors or local partners on circular activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	CE
11	Do you have access to shared resources, networks or innovation hubs to support circular work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	CE
12	Do you track at least one indicator linked to waste, reuse, repair or circular revenue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	All

Pathway key: CDA = Circular Design Accelerator · RC = Resource Champions · PO = Production Optimizers · SDE = Smart Digital Enablers · ME = Market Educators · CE = Collaborative Ecosystems

Priority pathway(s) for this company: _____

8.2 Tool 2. Pathway Selection Matrix

Purpose: Turn the six pathways into a quick selection grid. Read each row and circle / highlight the pathway that best fits.

<p>Circular Design Accelerator (CDA)</p> <p><i>Use this pathway if...</i></p> <p>Your main barrier is product design — items are hard to repair, reuse, disassemble or recycle.</p>	<p><i>Skip this pathway if...</i></p> <p>Your products are already well designed and the main issues are production, communication or partnerships.</p>	<p><i>Often combines well with...</i></p> <p>Smart Digital Enablers, Market Educators.</p>
<p>Resource Champions (RC)</p> <p><i>Use this pathway if...</i></p> <p>You depend on raw materials, generate production waste, or want to work with recycled / bio-based / by-product inputs.</p>	<p><i>Skip this pathway if...</i></p> <p>Your business is service-based with little physical material flow.</p>	<p><i>Often combines well with...</i></p> <p>Production Optimizers, Collaborative Ecosystems.</p>
<p>Production Optimizers (PO)</p> <p><i>Use this pathway if...</i></p> <p>You need refill, return, reusable packaging or logistics that the current operations cannot yet support.</p>	<p><i>Skip this pathway if...</i></p> <p>You have no physical operations or no customer return loop is needed.</p>	<p><i>Often combines well with...</i></p> <p>Smart Digital Enablers, Market Educators.</p>
<p>Smart Digital Enablers (SDE)</p> <p><i>Use this pathway if...</i></p> <p>You want to track products, monitor materials, manage returns, analyse data or measure impact digitally.</p>	<p><i>Skip this pathway if...</i></p> <p>You have no clear circular problem that digital tools would solve.</p>	<p><i>Often combines well with...</i></p> <p>Any other pathway — SDE is an enabler.</p>
<p>Market Educators (ME)</p> <p><i>Use this pathway if...</i></p> <p>Customers do not understand or trust the circular value of</p>	<p><i>Skip this pathway if...</i></p> <p>Your customers already understand and value the circular dimension; the real</p>	<p><i>Often combines well with...</i></p> <p>Circular Design Accelerator, Collaborative Ecosystems.</p>

your offer.	bottleneck is operations.	
Collaborative Ecosystems (CE) <i>Use this pathway if...</i> You cannot implement the circular solution alone — you need partners, shared resources or networks.	<i>Skip this pathway if...</i> Your circular activity is fully internal and does not depend on external actors.	<i>Often combines well with...</i> Resource Champions, Market Educators.

Selected primary pathway: _____

Secondary pathway(s) to combine: _____

8.3 Tool 3. Readiness Check

Purpose: Decide whether to start with a pilot, scale an existing practice, or integrate a more advanced system. Score each statement from 0 (No) to 2 (Yes). Add the scores separately for each block.

Block A — Circular readiness

Statement	0 – No	1 – Partly	2 – Yes
I know the material composition and origin of my main product/input.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have identified at least one waste stream or by-product I could reduce or reuse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have tested or operate at least one circular practice (repair, refill, return, reuse, recycle).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have at least one partner or supplier supporting my circular activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I track at least one circular indicator (waste, reuse, returns, repaired items, circular revenue).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Circular readiness total (0–10): _____

Block B — Digital readiness

Statement	0 – No	1 – Partly	2 – Yes
I collect customer or product data systematically (spreadsheet, CRM, form).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use QR codes, product labels or a website page to share product information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use a digital tool to manage orders, bookings, returns or subscriptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can produce simple reports or dashboards from my data.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statement	0 – No	1 – Partly	2 – Yes
I have access to a digital partner or in-house digital skills for new tools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital readiness total (0–10): ____

Reading the score

Score	Band	What it means	Suggested starting depth
0 – 3	Starter	Early stage; basic awareness.	Begin with one small pilot or one simple tool.
4 – 6	Developing	Some practice in place but not systematic.	Scale one practice; add structured tracking.
7 – 10	Advanced	Practices in place and managed.	Integrate, automate and connect with partners.

A simple tool used regularly is more valuable than an advanced system that is too difficult to maintain.

8.4 Tool 4. Action Planning Canvas

Purpose: Turn the chosen pathway into one specific, testable action for the next 90 days. Fill each of the six boxes below.

<p>1. Selected pathway <i>Which of the six pathways are you working on?</i></p>	<p>2. Specific action (next 90 days) <i>One concrete, testable action. Avoid vague goals.</i></p>	<p>3. Resources needed <i>Time, budget, materials, skills.</i></p>
<p>4. Partners to involve <i>Who provides what? Who is the first contact?</i></p>	<p>5. Digital tool to support <i>QR, form, dashboard, app — keep it minimal.</i></p>	<p>6. Success indicator <i>One number you will check at the end of 90 days.</i></p>

Tip: A useful action is specific. Example: "Test a return option for one packaging type with 20 customers" — not "become more circular."

8.5 Tool 5. Partner Mapping Worksheet

Purpose: Identify who you already work with and who you still need to bring in for circular implementation.

Step 1 — Stakeholder rings

Ring	Existing partners (write in black)	Missing / needed partners (write in red)
Materials & Suppliers		
Logistics & Operations		
Digital & Technology		
Customers & Communities		
Funding & Policy		

Step 2 — Three priority partners to approach next

Priority partner	What they provide / What we offer	First contact step

8.6 Tool 6. Revenue Stream Selector

Purpose: Identify which revenue streams to pilot first. Streams with three Yes answers are the strongest candidates for the next 6–12 months.

Revenue stream	Realistic in 6 months?	Requires partner?	Customer willing to pay?
Sales of circular / durable / reusable products	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Repair, upgrade or customisation services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Rental, leasing or product-as-a-service	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Subscription or refill model	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Deposit-return or take-back system	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Workshops, training or co-creation experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Licensing of designs, patterns or processes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Marketplace or platform commissions	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
B2B partnerships and corporate CSR packages	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Grants, sponsorships or funded pilot projects	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Top 2 revenue streams to test: _____

8.7 Tool 7. Monthly Impact Tracking Sheet

Purpose: Track a small number of meaningful indicators each month. Pick one indicator per cluster to start; add more once tracking is stable.

Indicator	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Notes
A. Material & Waste													
Kg of waste avoided or reused													
Share of recycled / bio-based materials (%)													
Number of reuse / refill cycles													
B. Customer Participation													
Number of returned or repaired products													
Customers in return / refill / repair schemes													
Workshop / awareness activity participants													
C. Business Value													
Revenue from circular products / services													
Repeat customers													
Estimated CO ₂ savings (kg)													

Rule of thumb: pick three indicators (one per cluster) and review them monthly. Add new indicators only when the first three are stable.

8.8 Tool 8. Digital Tool Starter List

Purpose: Quick reference for choosing a digital tool that matches your readiness level. Each tool should respond to a clear circular problem, not be adopted for its own sake.

Starter (low cost, no-code)	Developing (light tech, some integration)	Advanced (data infrastructure, automation)
QR codes linked to product info / care / repair pages	Airtable or Notion bases linking products, returns, customers	Digital product passports with structured lifecycle data
Spreadsheets to log returns, repairs, refills	Looker Studio or Power BI dashboards	IoT sensors / RFID / NFC tags for asset tracking
Google or Microsoft Forms for customer feedback	Subscription / booking tools (Stripe, Calendly, Shopify apps)	AI demand forecasting and fit / sizing recommendation tools
Simple product page or landing page with circular story	CRM with basic customer segmentation	API integrations between CRM, ERP and circular workflows
Social media campaigns and short video storytelling	E-mail automations: refill reminders, return prompts	Blockchain-based traceability or verification systems
Online community group (Facebook, WhatsApp, Discord)	Marketplace listing on existing platforms	Custom marketplace or matchmaking platform

Rule: A simple tool used regularly is more valuable than an advanced system that is too difficult to maintain.

9. Resources

D.2.1.1 WE.Circular Labs Concept. 2025.

D.2.1.2 Methodology for Pilot Testing. 2025.

Act.2.3 Co-creation Methodology. 2025.

Circular Business Model 1: Circular Design Accelerator. 2026.

Circular Business Model 2: Resource Champions. 2026.

Circular Business Model 3: Production Optimizers. 2026.

Circular Business Model 4: Smart Digital Enablers. 2026.

Circular Business Model 5: Market Educators. 2026.

Circular Business Model 6: Collaborative Ecosystems. 2026.

D.2.4.2 Pilot Testing Report. 2026.

National Pilot Testing Reports prepared by project partners. 2026.

Reports from National co-creation workshops. 2025–2026.

O.3.2 Transnational Strategy for WEs Circular Transition. 2026.