



Close the loop on single-use

A reusables guide for
hospitality businesses

What is a reuse system?

A reuse system does more than encourage customers to bring their own (BYO) reusable cups, straws or containers. It allows businesses to provide customers with reusable containers for takeaway, and asks customers to return them and keep them in circulation.

A reuse system can be implemented by an individual business or within business precincts, such as office buildings, shopping districts, or university campuses. Reuse systems are also suited to events and catering.

The tips in this guide are based on the experiences and learnings of businesses that took part in reuse pilots funded by Sustainability Victoria. They trialled reuse systems in small precincts like office buildings, university food halls, catered events and mobile coffee carts.

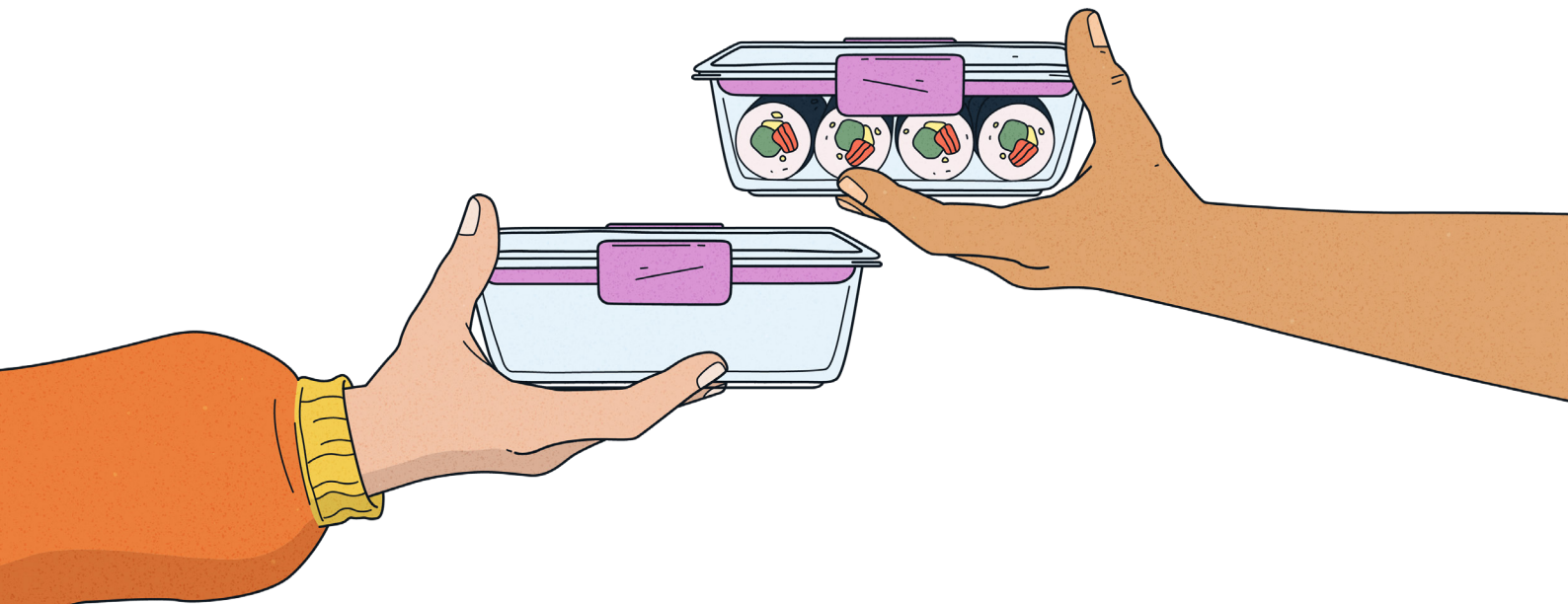
Before you start – your action plan

The steps below can help you to plan a reuse system that will work best for your business.

1. Consider your setting

It's important to think about:

- Your location
- Your external cleaning contractor or waste-management team, if you have one
- How you interact with other businesses and your customers
- How convenient it is for customers to return items to you.



2. Choosing suitable reuse products

Take time to select the right products. Thorough research is crucial for achieving long-term cost savings and making the most of your initial investment.

Ask your stakeholders (like staff and cleaners) specifically about any barriers they foresee to adopting a reuse system and certain materials or products that might make their jobs harder.



Things to consider when researching reusable products:

- Are they fit for purpose?** Are the containers suitable for all items on your menu? What are they made from? Will reusable cups alter the taste of the coffee or negatively affect the user experience?
- Quality:** Will the reusable products remain in circulation beyond their break-even point? Are the lids durable and will they prevent spillage?
- Place of manufacture:** Try to support local businesses by ordering from companies in your area or within Australia. Consider shipping times.
- Storage and cleaning:** Do the products need to be stackable, or stored in containers to keep them free from dust? Do you need to consider also buying trolleys for collecting items for cleaning? Do you need a special dishwasher?
- Labelling:** Is it clear that the products are meant to be returned rather than recycled or disposed of? Can your business logo be added to encourage returns instead of taking items home?
- Cost to the business:** Consider factors like minimum order quantity and potential loss rates.
- Integration with current operations:** Does your new system come with the software you need to register and track the new system? Does it integrate with existing point-of-sale (POS) systems? What operational changes are required for staff and how will this affect their time and the day-to-day operation of your business?
- User journey:** Can baristas still write orders on reusable coffee cups? If not, what are possible solutions to this? Are items convenient for customers to carry if they're not returning them immediately? Does the food maintain its presentation?

The reuse pilots favoured plastic and melamine reusables because they are lightweight and durable. Stainless steel cups and containers, and cups made from coffee husk, were also well-received.

Many businesses that took part in the pilot program partnered with one or more reusable suppliers and preferred to source items locally where possible.

3. Ensure all stakeholders are on board

Engaging with your customers, suppliers and staff early and consistently is as crucial as selecting the right reuse system. Make a list of parties you need to involve, such as hospitality businesses, cleaning contractors, facilities managers, suppliers and consumers.

Initiate discussions with each stakeholder group. Ask about their requirements, motivations and challenges. This allows you to view the entire user journey from each group's perspective.



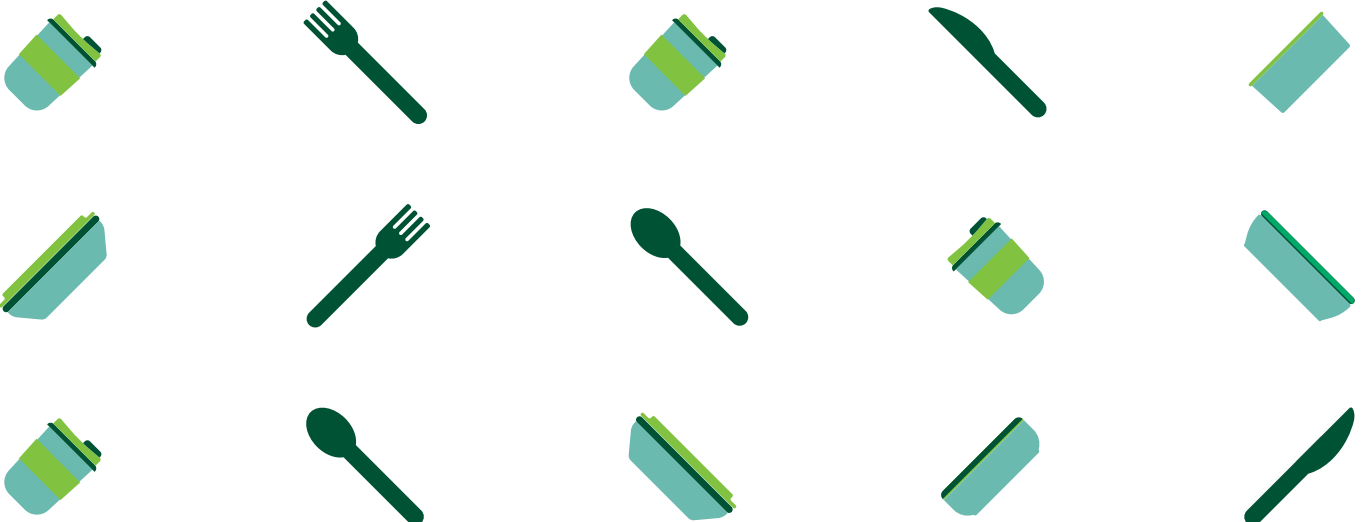
Questions to ask your stakeholders:

- Will the reuse system be convenient for them?
- Will it include any extra costs?
- Do they understand the advantages of reuse compared to single-use?
- Will a new reuse system disrupt staff's usual operations or place additional demands on their time?
- What do they need from you to make things run smoothly?

The reuse systems you choose should be user-friendly and easy to adopt and use.

Pilot programs showed that when reuse systems were challenging to integrate with existing point-of-sale systems or required significant changes to the regular running of the business they weren't successful.

This put pressure on already time-constrained staff, making them less inclined to recommend the reuse options.



4. Plan your promotion and have clear messaging

Clear messaging should be prepared well in advance of launching a new reuse system. Understanding your stakeholders is essential because you may need to develop different communication materials and messages tailored to each audience.



Your communications plan should include:

- A list of the people you need to inform
- What you need to tell them, like what the change is, what the benefits are, what actions they need to take
- The best ways and channels to reach your audience
- Will you be including any promotions or launch deals, such as discounts on coffees bought using a reusable cup.

When engaging with stakeholders, consider the following:

- Hospitality businesses are time poor and therefore difficult to engage via email or online resources. They respond better to face-to-face engagement.
- Behaviour change is a complex process – different people respond to different messages. Consider promoting the benefits of reuse from various angles, such as:
 - Waste reduction: Become a sustainability champion by reducing waste.
 - Cost savings: How much is that single-use cup really costing you? Sign up for reuse and receive a free coffee or lunch.
 - Environmental impact: We've saved xx cups from ending up in landfills this month.
 - Convenience: Easily return your items for washing here.
 - Friendly competition: Can your office save the most single-use containers from ending up in landfill?
- For culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) audiences, think about creating resources in multiple languages and gathering feedback on specific needs and cultural differences.

After the initial launch phase, keep customers informed about the reuse system to prevent products from being discarded or not returned. Ideally, there should be dedicated on-site ambassadors leading up to and following the launch of the new system to support the transition.

Offering discounts on food or drinks at participating businesses engages people and encourages participation. If this isn't feasible, consider implementing a surcharge for disposable items.

If you are providing discounts to introduce reusable products, it is vital to develop a plan for maintaining engagement beyond that time. Pilot programs have demonstrated that participation tends to decrease after the initial discount or activation phase, highlighting the importance of clear and consistent messaging to keep people engaged.

Costs to consider

On top of the obvious cost of the reuse system itself, here are some other costs to consider:

- Initial engagement costs, discounts or activations, and communication materials.
- Cost to the consumer – will the customer pay a deposit that can be refunded on returning the item? Do you plan to implement a surcharge on single-use items?
- Do you need to budget time for training your staff on the new reuse system?
- Do you need to buy new software or a new point of sale system?
- What existing single-use stock do you have? What do you want to do with it, and do you want to factor this into your cost-benefit calculations?

Evaluation

To evaluate the success of your new system you need to record data to track how the reuse system is performing against single-use items. Finding the right data-collection method is important because data tracking shouldn't place too much time pressure on staff – ideally it can integrate with your current point of sale system.



Evaluation tasks:

- Do a waste audit:** Count the number of single-use items in your bins before and after you implement your reuse system to determine the number of single-use items you are saving from landfill. [Here is a free online waste audit guide.](#)
- Record the number of reusable items purchased or washed:** To determine how many single-use items have been saved.
- Collect feedback:** Check in regularly with customers and other stakeholders and be prepared to adjust processes as needed. Remember, what might work well in one setting may not work as consistently in another.

Data tracking can also act as positive reinforcement and make customers feel empowered by their choice to reuse.

By evaluating and reporting on your successes you can celebrate the impact you're having and educate others on why ditching single-use is so important.

Summary

The businesses that had the most successful transition to a reusable system had the following:

An efficient and easy-to-use collection and return system

The most successful businesses were those where customers consumed their food and drinks on-site. They had a clear, convenient process for collecting and returning items. Key to this was effective communication about which bins to use, and clear signage for where items should be returned. Businesses that did the above had a reduced rate of reusable items going missing.

Credibility

Projects that were overseen by trusted individuals, such as facilities managers, were taken more seriously, and the uptake was higher.

Stakeholder engagement

Talking to key stakeholders – like suppliers, customers and staff – early in the process made it more likely hospitality businesses and cleaning contractors would participate enthusiastically and integrate reusable practices into their existing operations.

A fit-for-purpose cleaning process

Adequate dishwashing facilities were crucial to the success of the reuse pilots. A dishwasher needs to be either already available or installed before the launch of the new system.

Planning and resourcing

Businesses that had clear roles and responsibilities for their team members that were understood by the whole business had more successful reuse systems. They invested a significant amount of time planning the implementation of the system, particularly in the early stages of research and engagement.

Thinking about the customer experience

Projects that thought about the user experience of their system (such as how easy it is to find a return point, or how close return points were to point of sale) had more success.

Considering the barriers to adoption

The businesses that thought about the potential barriers to adoption before starting their new reuse system were able to come up with plans to address these issues in advance.

Links and resources

Visit the [Single-use Plastics page on the Sustainability Victoria website](#) to find out more about organisations who have trialled reuse systems, and tips and tricks for starting your own reuse journey.

Resources include:

[Accepting reusables at your business](#) – guidance, communications resources, and a list of companies providing reuse solutions.

[Case studies](#) – SV funded 16 Reuse Pilot projects to trial different reuse models in various settings to demonstrate what is feasible in the hospitality sector in Victoria.

[Success stories](#) – learn how some other businesses have made the change.

Webinars and masterclasses – sharing real-world experiences and learnings for reuse solutions.

[Campaign asset library](#) – communications resources to promote the single-use plastics ban.

[Current regulations](#) – what the single-use plastics ban means for you.

[Tips for being plastic free](#) – simple swaps to reduce single-use plastic.

Other useful links:

Visit your [local council's website](#) for a list of plastic-free businesses in your area.

[BYO Containers](#) – download resources for businesses or get on the interactive search map.

