



# Sustainable Procurement *and the* Circular Economy

By Debra Rowe, Ph.D., and Reniera O'Donnell

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is championing the new circular economic model in Europe, the United States, and beyond, working across businesses, cities and governments, and educational institutions in many areas, such as plastics, food, fashion, and finance. The [Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium \(HEASC\)](#)—of which APPA is a founding member—is helping to bring information on sustainable procurement and the circular economy to higher education. HEASC is a network of higher education associations with a commitment to advancing sustainability within their constituencies and the entire system of higher education.



The current “take-make-waste” linear economy needs to be transformed. The circular economy offers a framework for change that is based on three key principles:

- designing out waste and pollution,
- keeping products and materials in use, and
- regenerating natural systems.

As organizations mature in their circular economy journey, there is increasing discussion on the role of procurement and the supply chain. Companies such as [Renault](#) have developed their own closed-loop supply chains to ensure a stable, cost-competitive supply of recycled plastic. This ability to influence and create circular supply chains is not just limited to the automotive industry.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s “[toolkit for policymakers](#)” has a dedicated chapter on public procurement, which has multiple synergies for those in the higher education sector. University campuses wield large purchasing power and can significantly influence their supply chains in the same ways. There is a range of resources available to help support the transition to a circular procurement model, and links to many of these are included below.

Following are five key ways in which your institution’s procurement choices can influence the transition to a circular economy:

1. Use your new campus project as a research base or testbed for new circular economy models, products, or services.
  - *Arizona State University has worked with the City of Phoenix on the [RISN \(Resource Innovation and Solutions Network\) project](#), which has seen the creation of 16 new companies and 74 jobs, and stimulated changes in the local economy that provide more circular business solutions in the supply chain.*
2. Put circular procurement policies in place at the highest possible level within the university.
  - *The City of Toronto established a cross-divisional [Circular Economy Working Group](#) to apply circular economy principles to the city’s procurement processes. Could you convene a cross-departmental/school group to achieve this result?*

3. Use circular economy criteria in the maintenance, renovation, or development of all campus buildings and landscape.
  - *Ensure suppliers hold a registry of building materials and components so that value can be captured and reuse is made possible.*
  - *Use cradle-to-cradle (C2C) principles when designing new buildings or retrofitting. [Venlo City Hall in The Netherlands](#) is a good case study of how this can be accomplished.*
4. Use circular economy criteria when tendering new contracts.
  - *Use onsite anaerobic digesters as part of your new waste management contract, with the digestate being used to fertilize gardens or even food growing projects.*
  - *Employ reusable canteen containers and cutlery systems in preference to recycling systems.*
5. Use your procurement to stimulate the transition to new business models.
  - *Do you need to buy new furniture? Could you lease it instead? Product-as-a-service is a viable circular economic business model.*

The following resources are useful reading and can be utilized to support university procurement policies:

- [REBus \(Resource Efficient Business Model\) case studies](#) include a [guide for circular procurement](#) and suppliers. REBus is a project funded by LIFE+, the European Union’s funding instrument for environmental action.
- [Case Study: C2C carpets for buildings in San Francisco.](#)
- [The Green Deal](#) in the Netherlands provides a good [case study library](#) of public procurement for a circular economy. This government program furnishes advice on regulation, administration, financing, and in some cases amendments to regulations, while facilitating the involvement of key stakeholders. The government has managed to stimulate economic activity from the ground up without offering any further financial incentives. [Here you can find a review](#) summarizing three years of the Green Deal on Circular Procurement.

## HEASC

The Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (HEASC) is a network of higher education associations with a commitment to advancing sustainability within their constituencies and the entire system of higher education. HEASC was formed in December 2005 by leaders of several higher education associations to support and enhance the capacity of higher education to fulfill its unique and critical role in creating a healthy, just, and sustainable future. Members recognize that fulfilling their mission in the 21st century requires a broader, systemic, collaborative approach to their own work and that of the constituents they serve. Members meet on a quarterly basis by phone and once a year in person to collaborate, share best practices, and initiate new ideas to advance sustainability. AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) serves as the coordinating body for HEASC.

- In spring 2020, a dedicated deep dive on procurement and supply-chain management will be released as part of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Learning Hub.
- The [Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council](#) has many additional resources.
- Look for an upcoming webinar and workshop from HEASC on this topic for APPA members ([www.aashe.org/heasc](http://www.aashe.org/heasc)).
- Remember the importance of shifting from fossil fuels and moving to energy efficiency and renewable energies to diminish the worst impacts of climate change and reduce volatile energy costs. See how this can be a cost-effective transition for all energy usage, according to a [newly released study](#).
- Many students feel despondent about the environment and may show up at your door, requesting more change. When students ask for more action on reducing the use of fossil fuels, you can help them get involved in state-level energy policies by sharing the resources developed by HEASC's initiative "Beyond Doom and Gloom: Engage in Climate Solutions." You and/or the students and other staff can participate in HEASC's [Sustainability Policy Partners network](#). Over 90 campuses in 33 states are already involved. 🌱

Debra Rowe is president of the U.S. Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development and advisor and program director for the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium. She can be reached at [debrarowe@aya.yale.edu](mailto:debrarowe@aya.yale.edu). Reniera O'Donnell is the higher education lead at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and can be reached at [reniera.odonnell@ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](mailto:reniera.odonnell@ellenmacarthurfoundation.org). This is her first article for *Facilities Manager*.

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