

# Post-consumer textiles for the refurbishment of office chairs

**The municipality of Groningen (The Netherlands) has the ambition to become a zero waste municipality by 2030. To reach this goal, Groningen is reducing its waste streams by preventing new waste flows and by converting waste into resources. In a ten year contract for the supply of circular office furniture, a pilot called Gronings Goud explores the possibilities to reuse collected textile for the refurbishment of office chairs.**

Vepa, a manufacturer of office furniture, is the supplier in the 10 year circular contract of Groningen. The contract with Vepa is based on four principles that are considered each time the municipality has a demand for furniture:

1. Use existing furniture as much as possible (**maintain and repair**);
2. Make existing furniture suitable in a simple manner, for example by cleaning it or simple refurbishment (**re-use**);
3. Use existing furniture and **refurbish** it or **re-manufacture** it;
4. Buy new circular furniture that meets circular design principles (at product-component- and material level).

The contract offers the possibility to experiment in developing new circular products that contribute to circular economy goals, in collaboration with Vepa and other market players. The pilot Gronings Goud uses this room for experimentation to explore how collected textile can be reused for the refurbishment of office chairs. It maps the value chain of used textile and explores the challenges and opportunities of reusing it. By doing so, the municipality stimulates innovation. The main aim of this pilot is to develop a circular showcase product that can serve as a tangible example of the circular economy.

The pilot relies heavily on co-creation, involving multiple stakeholders in the value chain. There's Vepa, as well as two social enterprises: the central textile collector GoudGoed and ReBlend. Goudgoed collects 14.000 kilo of used textile and sorts it with Reblend. Reblend develops closed textile loops in which the textile products are made of end-of-life textile that would otherwise have been incinerated or downcycled in a lower-value product. Reblend shreds the sorted textile, spins yarn from it and then weaves fabrics from these shredded materials. The collected textiles are converted into fabric, which Vepa uses to refurbish office chairs for the municipality of Groningen.

The pilot is a showcase in which the municipality serves as launching customer. By the end of the pilot, it will be interesting to see how it can be upscaled. And this pilot is not the only one: Groningen and Vepa also explore the possibilities to use recycled wood and roadside grass for the production of table blades. It will be an ongoing process for the municipality of Groningen to explore how all waste streams can be converted into resources. By doing so, the municipality builds new social partnerships around value chains.

## Setting up the ten year circular office furniture contract

When the municipality of Groningen started thinking about the new contract for office furniture, they had no general starting point. However, there were national targets for circularity and the municipality had an ambition.

The following steps led to the circular contract:

1. Conduct a market orientation study. The conclusion of this study was that the most suitable sector for circular procurement was furniture.
2. Develop starting points, by following a one-year course offered by Pianoo (the Dutch Public Procurement Expertise Centre) and organised by Copper8.
3. First procurement phase: open a call in the market. One of the criteria called on interested market parties to measure the circularity of their furniture by using a tool ([Circular IQ](#)). The results were assessed by an independent consultancy (Lloyd).
4. Second procurement phase: develop a case study. The three remaining market parties were asked to develop a case study. They received information about an office, the furniture in it, the amount of square meters, the people who work there and their needs. The starting point was to use existing materials as much as possible to discover which party was best placed to deliver the needs of the contract in a real-life situation.

The most important keys to success:

1. Get the responsible alderman involved, for support at implementation level.
2. Get the procurement department involved at an early stage. Two procurers took part in the Copper8 course.
3. The 10 year duration of the circular contract is made possible in the name of innovation, in order to have sufficient time to jointly experiment and develop.
4. The development of a case study in the procurement process, turned out to be an essential step in finding the right market party for the contract. It enabled the procurers to discover which party could really deliver on their promises and which party had the right mindset to apply circular ideas in practice.
5. Ask for maximum transparency in costs. Vepa delivers periodical reports that gives insight into how the expenses are structured per project. These reports help to get the internal organization behind circular procurement and to show that “sustainable” doesn’t necessarily lead to “higher costs”.
6. Set up contract management. The contract manager ensures that the contract is performed as intended. If you do it well, it will prove its worth.