



Collecting Materials

How to collect, manage and reuse
surplus materials through local partnerships
and community contributions

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Building a Local Materials Ecosystem

Creative making doesn't necessarily require expensive resources. Building a local materials ecosystem, based on reuse, surplus, and circular exchange, helps reduce waste, involve communities, and make your space more accessible and sustainable.

Alternatively, you may encourage citizens to contribute or donate their own materials. However, it is essential to clearly define the guidelines for material contribution, aligning with your project's goals, specific needs, and the available storage capacity of the space.

To build this ecosystem, partnerships should be approached strategically rather than informally.

How to Start

1. Identify What You Need

- List common materials used in your planned workshops (e.g. fabrics, paper, wood scraps, old clothes, plastic items).

- Consider tools, hardware, or packaging waste (e.g. buttons, cardboard, wires).

How to choose sustainable materials

- Prioritize **natural, local, or biodegradable materials**.
- Avoid **storing** large quantities you can't use or rotate.
- Include the **material story** in your workshops: *"This thread came from..."*
- **Consider circularity from the start: is this reusable, fixable, shareable, easy to disassemble?**
- When working with used clothes, prioritize reuse as clothing whenever they are still in good condition. **Upcycling, recycling, or transforming** garments should come after considering whether they can continue to be worn as they are.
- **Align with purpose:** only accept materials that fit your space, storage capacity, and long-term learning goals.

2. Map Potential Donors

→ **Look for actors who regularly generate surplus materials** (Position your initiative as a circular partner that gives materials a second life in an educational and community-driven context.):

- Local businesses (fashion brands, designers, tailors, print shops, DIY stores)
- Recycling or reuse centres
- Municipality-run waste collection hubs
- Makerspaces and fab labs (offcuts and surplus)
- Cultural institutions (theatres, costume departments, art schools)
- Schools and universities (disposal from labs or departments)

→ You can use the [make-a-thek mapping](#) for your research start

3. Initiate Partnerships

- Partnerships work best when they are mutually beneficial. To start, prepare a short info pack (1 page is enough!) outlining your library's project: its aims, who benefits, what materials you accept, and any volume or condition requirements. Be clear about drop-off rules - without clear guidelines, donations can quickly become unmanageable or misaligned with your goals.

Offer value to partners:

- Visibility: logo placement, social media mentions, press references, "Partner of the Month" wall, event participation, or online presence
- Storytelling opportunities: show how surplus materials are transformed into creative output
- ESG / CSR recognition: highlight your partner's contribution to sustainability and community impact
- Impact data: e.g., kilograms of materials reused, participants reached

This approach shifts the narrative from a simple donation to a collaborative circular impact, making the partnership meaningful, transparent, and engaging for everyone involved.

Tools You Can Use

- **Donor Template Letter** (to request leftover materials or propose collaboration)
- **Community Call Poster** ("Donate your old textiles!")
- **Basic Visual Guidelines** (show what's accepted: YES/NO chart)
- **Material Log Sheet** (track quantities, origin, suggested use)
- **Partnership Agreement** (One-pager clarifying expectations, recognition, pickup logistics, and frequency of donations)

Donor Template Letter

Subject: Help Us Build a More Creative and Sustainable Community Space

Dear [Name / Organization],

We are reaching out from [Library Name], where we are launching **make-a-thek**, a new community-oriented makerspace inside our library. **The space will host creative workshops and hands-on learning activities open to all, with a special focus on circular practices, reuse, and accessible making.**

To make this possible, we're building a **local network of partners** who can support us by donating **leftover, second-hand, or surplus materials**. Items like [fabrics, paper offcuts, wood scraps, unused stock, etc.] can be given a second life in our creative sessions for children, teens, adults, and seniors.

By becoming a material partner, your organization would actively contribute to reducing waste, strengthening local circular practices, and supporting inclusive education in our community — while gaining visible recognition as a sustainability partner.

Would your team be interested in contributing materials or collaborating with us?

We'd be happy to mention your contribution visibly in the space and online as a local sustainability partner.

If you're open to exploring this, we'd love to meet or send more details. Thank you for considering this opportunity to support creativity and circularity in our community!

Warm regards,

[Name]

[Role – e.g. Makerspace Coordinator]

[Library Name]

[Contact info – phone/email/website]

4. Organise Storage and Curation

- Create a visible “**Material Gallery**” in your space.
- **Label materials with origin** (e.g. “*Donated by Teatro X*”) or **communicate the partnerships in the common areas**
- **Display example projects** made from these donations.

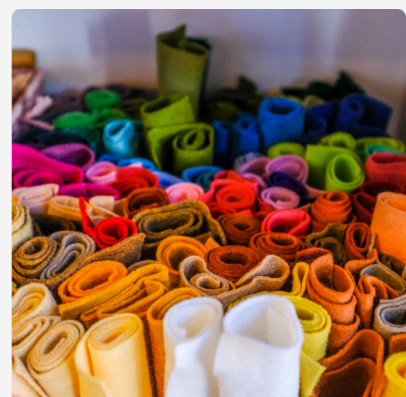
5. Involve the Community

- Launch a “**Material Week**” or “**Bring your fabric**” days to crowdsource items from users.
- Run repair or upcycling sessions where people can bring old items and give them new life.
- Include **kids or teens in sorting and repurposing challenges**.

6. Establish Internal Guidelines

Before collecting materials, clarify:

- **What is truly needed for your activities?**
- **How much storage space is available?**
- **Who is responsible for sorting and quality control?**
- **How often materials can be collected or rotated?**



Material Intake Checklist

A simple material intake checklist can help prevent overload and ensure that donated or collected materials are safe, useful, and aligned with the needs of the space. Providing a reusable checklist template can make the intake process clearer for staff, partners, and community donors.

Before accepting materials, check:

- ☐ **type of material;**
- ☐ **condition and cleanliness;**
- ☐ **possible safety concerns;**
- ☐ **quantity and storage needs;**
- ☐ **potential use in planned activities;**
- ☐ **alignment with the make-a-thek goals;**
- ☐ **donor name and origin of the material.**

Building a local material ecosystem is not just a logistical task - it is a strategic step toward embedding circularity, accessibility, and community ownership into the activities.