

City of Vancouver

Circular Economy and Social Value Case Study

How the City of Vancouver addresses e-waste and access to technology within the community.



THE OPPORTUNITY

E-WASTE AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Electronics are essential in our daily lives. Global pressures, such as the pandemic, have furthered our reliance on technology while also uncovering a growing digital divide issue. Furthermore, shifting attitudes around waste management have increased awareness of the impact of irresponsible handling of electronics waste, especially as innovations in tech have made recycling e-waste at times more complex and challenging.



The City of Vancouver is on a path to help mitigate these issues, with a plan for achieving zero waste by 2040. One of the supporting commitments is to extend the life of materials at their highest value through repair and refurbishment – which is an important principle in the transition towards a circular economy. Additionally, the City has an established Social Value Procurement Framework (SVF) which encourages procurements that increase reconciliation, inclusion, diversity, well-being, and economic opportunities for underserved communities. This means City staff are constantly identifying procurements that can support these strategic goals, while encouraging vendors to implement innovative solutions.

One such opportunity was the procurement and end-of-life management of IT hardware and software. At the time, the City's e-waste practices consisted of sending the end-of-life items to a for-profit (B-Corp) e-waste recycler, that donated some proceeds to charities. The City was looking for ways to improve upon this process, while incorporating principles from both the SVF and Zero Waste 2040 plan.

THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

CITY SEEKS VENDOR OFFERING FULL CIRCLE SOLUTIONS

Near the end of 2019, it was decided that the City would release a large multifaceted Request for Proposal (RFP) that would combine the supply and end-of-life management for IT – with the aim of finding a vendor who could offer this full life-cycle service. Many City stakeholders were involved in planning this RFP, starting with the Department of Community Services who first went about uncovering exactly what happened with the City's IT hardware by contacting the City's Sustainability group and Supply Chain's Manager of Sustainable Procurement. While the procurement was centralized through Supply Chain with Technology Services (TS) department, other groups including the Vancouver Police Board (VPD), the Vancouver Public Library Board (VPL) were also engaged as evaluators for incoming responses to the RFP.

The City included a specific criterion within the RFP that required the proponent to be able to refurbish 90-95% of the hardware at end-of-useful-life, approximately 1000 pieces of equipment per year, leaving it up to the respondents to outline how they would accomplish this. The expectation was that a vendor would be able to partner with a community organization to support the refurbishment and redistribution of equipment into the community.

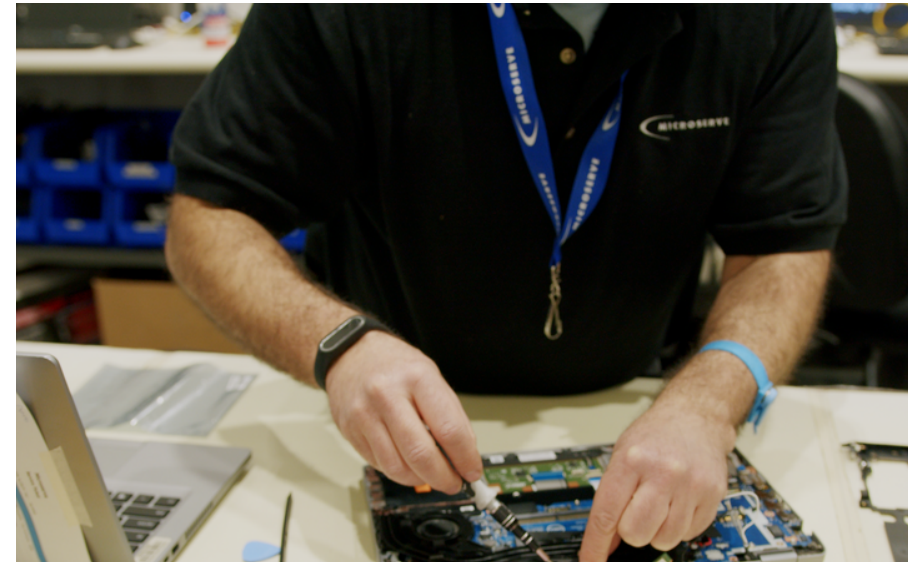
The timing of the Covid-19 pandemic initially delayed the procurement process, as staff's technology needs changed in a work from home environment; ultimately resulting in a year gap between issuing the RFP and closing contract negotiations.



THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS CONT.

CITY SEEKS VENDOR OFFERING FULL CIRCLE SOLUTIONS

In 2022, the contract was awarded to Microserve, an end-to-end IT solutions provider which specializes in the complete life cycle management of hardware and software, including testing for usable life before recycling. A significant piece of Microserve's value to the City was their long standing history of working with the public sector and a strong partnership with BC Tech for Learning, who is a BC based not-for-profit who services and redistributes used technology.



THE SUPPLIER

CITY AWARDS CONTRACT TO MICROSERVE, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BC TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING SOCIETY

Microserve is proud to be a market leader in the delivery of end-to-end information technology solutions and services to organizations based in Western Canada. We exist to provide IT solutions that empower people to be successful and achieve their goals. Established in Vancouver in 1987, Microserve has grown to be one of the largest IT solution providers in Canada, and the largest based in British Columbia.

As a local business we are passionate about the responsibility and opportunity we have to contribute to our communities through job creation, providing professional and career development opportunities, philanthropy, community involvement and volunteerism, and through delivering service excellence to our clients across Western Canada that rely on our IT services to accomplish their own missions.



THE SUPPLIER

CITY AWARDS CONTRACT TO MICROSERVE, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BC TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING SOCIETY

Incorporated in 1995, **BC Technology for Learning Society** is a registered charity that delivers the Government of Canada's Computers for Schools Plus (CFS+) program. They have redistributed over 195,000 computers across the province contributing to 2 million computers distributed Canada-wide. Youth technicians are offered paid work experience to refurbish equipment that is then sent to schools, low-income individuals, non-profits and Indigenous groups. Their mission is to provide job training for youth and access to affordable technology to British Columbians.

BC Tech has been working with Microserve for over 20 years and are now proud to be part of this project with the City of Vancouver. City IT assets will be redistributed directly to Vancouver based non-profits and low-income individuals, and BC Tech will be able to track and report numbers back to the City.

If your organization has old IT equipment that could use a second life, get in touch with BC Tech or your provincial CFS+ equivalent!



THE IMPACT

CITY HARDWARE FINDS NEW LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Reuse and Circularity

First reduce, then reuse, then recycle. Microserve has continued to evolve its life-cycle management services alongside the growing awareness from customers about the issues of traditional recycling and disposal. The first question asked when receiving end-of-life IT equipment is can it be reused, and if so, does it fit with BC Tech? By awarding a vendor who could fulfil the high refurbishment rate requirement, the City was able to take another step towards its goal of reusing materials at their highest value and supporting circular systems.



Addressing the Digital Divide

There are many people, including seniors and youth, the housing insecure, or other vulnerable individuals who do not have consistent access to computers. As more government, schooling, banking and other essential services are done online, this means people without digital access may experience increased isolation. Beyond the environmental benefits of reusing equipment, this contract helps to empower individuals and non-profit organizations who can better thrive with access to critical digital equipment.



THE IMPACT CONT.

CITY HARDWARE FINDS NEW LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Data Management

Computers are used as vessels for information and knowledge. This is why the security of managing data is as important as what you do with the hardware. Microserve is able to securely handle data through responsible permanent removal or asset recovery processes, leaving BC Tech with clean, ready-to-use computer equipment for the next user.



Supporting Local

By operating within the communities it serves, ensuring proximity of warehouses, and even hiring youth from the BC Tech employment program, Microserve aims to create additional place-based value which increases the social and environmental benefits of their services.



Youth Employment

BC Tech's delivery of the CFS Interns Program offers additional social benefits. Youth are given a paid internship, or volunteer opportunity to gain valuable experience with receiving, refurbishing, and distributing the tech. This program also allows youth to gain soft skills from peer-to-peer learning with a variety of roles and responsibilities to support their overall future employability.



OUTCOME

CITY HARDWARE FINDS NEW LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Simply by adding criteria for refurbishment within its procurement, the City of Vancouver enabled this multi-beneficial partnership between three organizations with lasting impacts on local individuals, while reducing waste and fostering a more circular economy.



“City of Vancouver is excited to work with Microserve and help BC Tech with their goals that ensure devices that are no longer useful to the organization get a second life in the community”

- Gordon McDonald, Manager of Desktop Services, Technology Services, City of Vancouver

“At BC Tech we work to deliver a quality reuse organization that supports learning, youth development and our environment. We are especially excited by the partnership with Microserve and the City of Vancouver because it will direct thousands of devices to us each year and do so in alignment with our values and goals focused on sustainability. It’s a true win-win-win collaboration.”

- Mary-Em Waddington, Executive Director, BC Technology for Learning Society

“We are thrilled to have the opportunity to work with the City of Vancouver as their IT solutions provider on this initiative to maximize social value and sustainability of their IT assets. At Microserve we are passionate about supporting our clients on their sustainability journeys, and to having a positive impact on the lives of people in our communities. We are proud of our long history of working with BC Tech for Learning, and of contributing to the great work that they do even in a small way. We strongly admire the City of Vancouver’s commitment to continuously advance sustainable procurement, and to finding ways to address inequitable access to technology in the community.”

- Heather Schaan, VP & General Manager, Microserve