

Nov. 2020 - March 2021

ENVIROLAB

ZERO WASTE & CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

FINAL REPORT





LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CityHive would like to recognize the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and the sə́lilwə́taʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations on whose land we live, learn and engage with youth.

We thank our host nations for being stewards of their lands and for leading the conversations about environmental movements and relationship to land for settlers and newcomers to Turtle Island. CityHive recognizes that the civic institutions and decision making processes we seek to influence through our Envirolab program are colonial, and have actively perpetuated harm to Indigenous peoples. It is through understanding our own unique relationship to this place, host nations, and Indigenous youth working to make change that we are able to reflect and act on decolonial practices.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a celebration of the third cohort of Envirolab, which unlike past cohorts, was held entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This cohort took place over 12 sessions between November 2020 and March 2021 and two final community presentations to the broader Metro Vancouver community. The Envirolab cohort included youth aged 18-30 from all over Metro Vancouver and represents a strong diversity of identities, positionalities, knowledge and lived experiences.

This cohort was bold! They brought a level of excitement and awareness that enabled them to critically think about their role in the circular economy and what system shifts are required to address zero waste. Through deepening learnings about zero waste and the circular economy, this cohort produced six project driven solutions to challenges and opportunities they identified through this process.

This report documents the program design, overviews of the projects that emerged and key learnings and insights. We look forward to future iterations of the program and upcoming cohorts. We are thankful to have had the opportunity to learn with and from this dynamic and engaged group of youth, project mentors, and guest speakers who joined us.

ABOUT CITYHIVE

CityHive is a Metro Vancouver-based non-profit organization on a mission to transform the way that young people are engaged in shaping their cities: in city planning, decision-making processes and urban sustainability issues. As a youth-led and youth-run non-profit, we harness the energy, experiences, and perspectives of youth to create projects and solutions to make our cities more sustainable, equitable and resilient. We work with civic institutions to transform the way that they engage youth to be more meaningful and inclusive.



OUR PROGRAM AREAS:

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CONSULTING

Youth engagement consulting and implementation, including fee-for-service work for municipal governments and other organizations or institutions looking to design or carry out youth engagement.



CIVIC EDUCATION

Building and creating experiential, knowledge-to-action civic education programs for youth (13-40 years old), in partnership with municipalities.



INNOVATION LABS

Planning, convening and facilitating Innovation Labs for youth to collaborate with municipal leaders on addressing urban and sustainability issues, including programs such as the 30Network and Envirolab.



In only four years, CityHive has run dozens of youth-centred programs and projects that have shifted youth engagement practices and offered opportunities for youth to become more civically engaged. CityHive partners with many organizations and institutions across Metro Vancouver to make our programming meaningful. Our work centres around building youth's capacity, connections and skills to tackle complex, systemic challenges from climate change to housing to civic engagement to the energy transition.

WHAT IS THE ENVIROLAB?

The Envirolab is a think-and-do-tank that blends creativity, community-based partnerships and innovation to engage youth from a variety of backgrounds - cultural, academic, professional and lived experiences - to learn about and take action to address sustainability and climate challenges. The Envirolab is facilitated in a process that empowers participants to learn about and identify current challenges and opportunities alongside local governments and community organizations. The Envirolab places youth at the intersection of learning, relationship building and solutions design. Where often youth are at the helm of climate action and making sure their voices are heard, the Envirolab aims to create a co-creative space for institutions to also learn from and work with youth, while centring youth's learnings and experiences.



THE THEMES

Envirolab themes have been developed and chosen meticulously with support and insight from our Steering Committee partners. The themes represent some of the most relevant and pressing environmental gaps, opportunities and challenges existing within Metro Vancouver. Past themes of the Envirolab include lighter footprint and the climate emergency.

COHORT 3

The theme for this cohort was Zero Waste and Circular Economies. The Envirolab is made possible through funding from the Lawson Foundation and Vancity Credit Union and developed with insight from our Steering Committee.



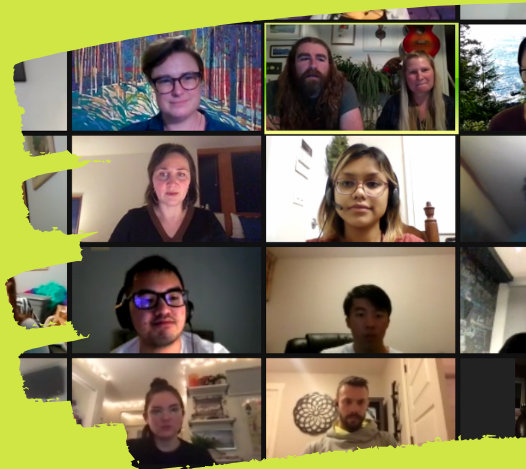
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The key objective of the Envirolab is to support youth from Metro Vancouver to create solutions-driven projects that address local sustainability and climate challenges. There are three key goals that work towards achieving this primary objective:

- 1** Build relationships and join a network of amazing emerging and established young leaders in Metro Vancouver.
- 2** Develop a solution driven project that creates real-world impact in your community.
- 3** Catalyze collaborative, meaningful youth-led actions and projects that address environmental challenges and take climate action.

By learning with and from experts and community leaders, youth feel equipped to design projects, actions, and/or products that address the urgency of our economy to rethink and refocus what it means to be a part of the circular economy, all while learning and building relationships with peers and leaders.

The third cohort of the Envirolab was hosted virtually over 12 weeks between November 2020 and March 2021. The shift to a virtual program delivery model posed a new opportunity for the Envirolab team to be creative in how to build an online community of engaged youth.



PREPARATION & PRE PLANNING

Through a series of internal pre planning meetings, meetings with the Steering Committee and early meetings with the Envirolab facilitation team, we were able to design a program model that worked to create opportunities for connection and relationship building amongst the cohort.

APPLICATIONS & PROMOTION

The Envirolab is composed of youth aged 18-30 who live, work, and learn throughout any of the 21 municipalities across Metro Vancouver. In order to reach as many youth as possible, including being connected to new communities of youth, the Envirolab actively promotes this opportunity through its established series of networks and partners, while continuing to critically look at who has previously not been engaged through our promotion. Overwhelmingly, the Envirolab saw 84 applications, of which 26 youth were selected to join this cohort.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

To build an enriching experience for the incoming cohort, the Envirolab team did a scan of businesses, organizations, industry leaders and local government departments working on zero waste and circular economy initiatives. We were pleased to have been able to collaborate with some amazing community partners, and invite them to join an evening of programming to share insights with the cohort, act as content mentors during project development phase and become part of the Envirolab network - further enabling this cohort to feel connected to leaders and decisions makers.

We invited knowledge experts, industry leaders and local government to participate throughout each phase of this process.



DEVELOPING THE FACILITATION TEAM & PROCESS DESIGN

After initial scoping of this program was complete, 5 youth leaders were brought together and tasked with leading, facilitating and delivering the program to the cohort participants. This program was co-led by Kathryn Trnavsky (CityHive) and Aarti Kamat (CityHive), and joined by three support facilitators; Rachel Cheang, Alice Henry and Dina Sadeghi. Together this team designed and facilitated the Envirolab sessions and supported the cohort participants for the duration of this lab.

MEET THE FACILITATION TEAM



WHY ZERO WASTE & THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

“Transitioning to a circular economy does not only amount to adjustments aimed at reducing the negative impacts of the linear economy. Rather, it represents a systemic shift that builds long-term resilience, generates business and economic opportunities, and provides environmental and societal benefits”.

- Ellen Macarthur Foundation



Today's economic models are linear. They examine product life cycles from conception through consumer use and finally, disposal. Point A to point B. But, they fail to recognize the cyclical potential of products and of the regenerative power that is possible by reimagining HOW and WHY we create and consume 'stuff'. Through examining zero waste initiatives as they relate to the circular economy, we can work together to imagine ways to build waste OUT and build disruption IN to these models.

Looking beyond the current take-make-waste extractive industrial model, a circular economy aims to redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits (EMF). Creating a shift in the system will require the collective action of individuals, businesses and governments. This will require not only a shift in our collective behaviours, but in the normalized and unconscious social practices that have become embedded within the cultural, social, and political contexts of our communities. Together, we can work to rethink, redesign and refocus the ways through which we understand and participate in the circular economy.

Since these declarations are largely symbolic, the Envirolab cohort was tasked with addressing the following questions to frame their understanding of this theme:

- What behavioral shifts can we encourage within zero waste initiatives to create a lasting impact on the circular economy model throughout Metro Vancouver?
- What opportunities are there for environmental, economic and social interventions when we think about zero waste?
- How can youth voice their concerns and meaningfully engage with local governments to put forth innovations that create change at the local level?
- What opportunities are there to leverage zero waste initiatives to support a just and green economic recovery that creates inclusive local jobs, including those for youth?
- Who is traditionally missing from conversations around 'zero waste' and how do we embed a strong equity lens within this work?

These questions were the driving force behind our exploration of the challenges and opportunities for cities across Metro Vancouver to proactively work with youth to think creatively about ways we can design waste out. By learning with and from experts in the fields of local governance, circular and sharing economies, community engagement, infrastructure, and more, the cohort participants will feel equipped to design projects, actions, and/or products that address the urgency of our economy to rethink and refocus what it means to be a part of the circular economy.

This cohort featured youth from a range of **diverse backgrounds** from across Metro Vancouver, who each brought their unique and personal lived experiences into the conversations around zero waste and circular economies

MEET THE COHORT



Envirolab brings in youth from diverse walks of life and allows them to share their love for the environment under one platform. The solution to climate change is not a one-way path and it requires thinking out of the box. Thus, the opportunity to engage in an interdisciplinary collaboration helps participants to see from different points of view.

- Cohort Participant

DESIGN PROCESS

The Envirolab program process makes sure that youth with different levels of knowledge and experience in the sustainability field can participate and bring in their lived experience and expertise. The framework we have developed from the program is rooted in **community based learning, relationship building, and partner-supported action planning**. This framework builds a learning arc that enables youth to come to the Envirolab with any level of understanding or knowledge about this topic and develop bold actions to address these challenges.



INSPIRATION & KNOWLEDGE


Conversations with industry leaders to level up knowledge to consider where we are at and where we want to be as we drive learning forward

IDEATION & INNOVATION

Identifying problem statements and developing solutions that enable the cohort to create together and consider how to develop projects

IMPLEMENTATION & ACTION

Developing a plan to bring ideas to life and consider how to best deliver these projects



Inspiration & Knowledge

conversations with peers and industry leaders to level up knowledge



Session 1
Community Building



Session 2
Building Knowledge



Session 3
Deepening Knowledge

Ideation & Innovation

identifying problem statements and developing solutions



Session 4
Understanding the Problem
Space



Session 5
Building a Vision



Session 6
Ideating & Solution
Building



Session 7
What's the Impact

Implementation & Action

developing a plan to bring ideas to life



Session 8
Project Framework



Session 9
Defining Success



Session 10
Mentor Night



Session 11
Pitching your Project



Session 12
Community Building

Community Event

a chance to share ideas and projects with the community



OUR IMPACT



As noted in the Overview of this report, the Envirolab seeks to enable participants to build and join a network of sustainability leaders, catalyze collaborative action in their communities and kickstart a project to take bold climate action. To assess whether the Lab is in fact achieving its objectives and goals, and to learn more about the impact of the program, we ask participants to respond to a survey upon completing their time with the program. As with previous Envirolab cohorts, participants had a generally positive experience that met the intended purpose of the program.

In addition, this year's Envirolab convened in a challenging context – a global pandemic that prevented the cohort from working together in person. This unique context required a different approach to program design and facilitation which provided important learnings for future iterations of this program.

A summary of some of the impact, feedback and learnings follows:

- The ability to connect with industry leaders made for meaningful connections and enabled the cohort to build their network of sustainability professionals.
- Informal social time with the cohort through session check ins and time for community updates throughout the night.
- The cohort playlist was developed as a way to keep us all connected and represented throughout the night - even inspiring a dance competition during break time.
- The ability to interact and build connections with like minded youth doing sustainability work.
- The approach to mentorship to provide guidance from experienced sustainability leaders to bring a real world lens to cohort projects.

"Youth have the immense potential to get Metro Vancouver to its environmental targets, as they are the future citizens. Programs like Envirolab helps to close the silo between the youth and decision makers, and allows youth to become changemakers in their own rights. They don't really have to take massive steps to create change. It's more by making consistent contributions to sustainable causes in one's community, that youth can become champions of climate mitigation."

- Cohort Participant



BY THE NUMBERS

8.5/10

Average rating of the lab

71%

Felt connected to decision makers, community organizations and thought leaders

79%

Felt confident in the process of developing and implementing a community project

79%

Of participants felt greatly connected to individuals and organizations already involved in the ZW+ CE space

86%

Of participants felt connected to other young leaders in the region who care about similar issues to them.

100%

Of respondents would do Envirolab again

“The Envirolab surpassed my expectations in all aspects...I was aware that it would likely bolster my resume, and I thought it would be nice to spend time with likeminded individuals. From the first meeting it was evident that I was in the company of young leaders, with a vast diversity of backgrounds. Each week I was enthralled with the amount of information provided about the circular economy. With that, the envirolab provided an opportunity to understand the current state of the linear economy, the solutions currently being implemented and the solutions that need to be developed. The best part was the interaction and the community.”

- Cohort Participant

“it was a judgement free zone, which was super helpful for people who might be joining for the first time for new topics”

- Cohort Participant

OUR LEARNINGS

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM THIS COHORT

- While the virtual platform has many opportunities, it also presents a unique challenge and places new limitations on the casual nature of interactions with guest speakers, mentors and participants.
- Begin the mentorship component earlier on in the process to create deeper connections to industry leaders.
- Being mindful of provincial health guidelines, blend opportunities to connect in small groups in person where possible to both enable more connections and also limit screen fatigue.
- Build in more unstructured work time for the cohort to have opportunities to connect with facilitators and mentors to support project development.

A NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY

The virtual delivery of the Envirolab for the third cohort provided a new opportunity to make the program more accessible to those otherwise unable to participate. The Envirolab saw a greater number of participants from a wider range of municipalities and backgrounds from across the Metro Vancouver region. Accessibility remains the key to equity-centred work and the Envirolab will continue to explore new opportunities for access to our programs through enhancing the application and recruitment process.



A NOTE ON EQUITY & DIVERSITY

The Envirolab is designed to empower youth from a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences and knowledge to embed new learnings into their journey as they innovate and take bold action to address climate change. The Envirolab centres principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in all elements of its program model. It is important that the Envirolab provide an open platform, free of barriers to participants from across Metro Vancouver. Hosting the program virtually allowed a greater range of participants from more geographies throughout the region. We seek to limit barriers to participation by offering honorariums and access to technology when requested. The Envirolab started the program with a community building session and invited participants to work through a reflective exercise to understand the set of biases and unconscious biases they brought into the program while also asking each participant to consider their positionality in climate work. These conversations were deepened by inviting speakers to host a session on decolonization and inviting Squamish Nation Elder to give the welcome at the community events.





THE PROJECTS



Deconstruct the City - designing a series of workshops to bring together leaders and change makers in the construction industry to accelerate the business case for designing for deconstruction.

Team Members: Rafa/ Max/ Sara T/ Madhuvandhi



Restaurant Buddies - creating a restaurant ecosystem to facilitate a platform to share common practices and strategies to reduce food waste

Team Members: Amylia/ Rudri/ Jasmine/ Melissa

Circular Consumption Farmateers - examining ways to make food waste personal and the value of local CSA boxes to support behaviour shifts as individuals, households and communities move towards zero waste.



Team Members: Jenric/ Anthony/ Breanne

Circular Construction Economy - a social platform implemented as a mobile app dedicated towards educating homeowners and community members on circular economy categories that positively impact construction practices.



Team Members: Carven/ Koushik/ Edna/ Zoe



[Rx]ePillable - developed a community based reusable pill bottle program that enables consumers feasible alternatives to reduce their environmental impact by using reusable and refillable prescription bottles.

Team Members: Noah/Julia/Carolina/Trina/Sara Y/ Greyson



Comunicycle - examining the use of mealworms as a viable solution to address the soft plastics and styrofoam waste problem in metro vancouver.

Team Members: Sayemin/ Kenny/ Harrison/ Mark

WITH THANKS

FUNDING PARTNERS

The Envirolab is made possible with generous support from the Lawson Foundation and Vancity Credit Union.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Envirolab is made possible with generous support from the Lawson Foundation and Vancity Credit Union. We are proud to work alongside an amazing set of partners who make up our Steering Committee to provide guidance and support to the development of this program and the cohort projects. We extend this thanks and gratitude to Vancity Credit Union, Vancouver Economic Commission, Burnaby Board of Trade, OneEarth, The Share.Reuse.Repair. Initiative, and the City of Vancouver.



COLLABORATORS

Envirolab Cohort 3 is pleased to have welcomed a dynamic set of collaborators to the program to support the knowledge and inspiration of program participants. We are excited to have had a chance to collaborate with:

- GHG Accounting
- Mugshare
- ChopValue
- Frameworkq
- Unbuilders
- Sea to Sky Removal
- Daniel Rotman Consulting
- Indigenuity
- Elder of Squamish Nation
- Michael Green Architecture
- OneEarth



WHAT'S NEXT?



The Envirolab is planning its next two labs through 2021.

Summer 2021 Cohort with a focus on Climate Adaptation.

Fall 2021 cohort with a focus on Climate Narratives.

Please reach out and connect, collaborate or learn with us.

info@cityhive.ca