



Strategic Plan for the Bower 2015 – 2017

Sustainable Communities

From its start in 1999, The Bower has sought to promote sustainable communities by reducing waste going to landfill through recovery, reuse, repair, upcycling and other waste avoidance and educational initiatives. This manifested itself initially with the design of The Bower straw bale building from reused and recovered materials; the truck service collecting used items for resale and the promotion and sale of upcycled goods. In later years we added a range of other initiatives including the Reuse and Referral service in partnership with Councils, the community education workshops. More recent programs include the hosting of the Marrickville Men's Shed, promoting social enterprises such as Hobogrow, the in-house electronic and furniture repair workshops and the Repair Cafe.

Fifteen years later The Bower remains committed to its original objectives which can be summarised as:

- Reducing waste going to landfill
- Providing goods at affordable prices
- Creating employment and training opportunities
- Promoting reuse and upcycling of preloved goods.

In 2015 we need to make important decisions around how we take the next step towards creating a long-term sustainable organisational and business model as community recyclers and, at the same time, position ourselves as a strong partner of local Councils assisting them with their Zero Waste objectives.

The Bower's reputation and profile as a leading and innovative re-user and repairer of preloved household goods and building material not only gives us an opportunity but also a responsibility to share our knowledge, expertise and unique organisational and business model with the wider community for the benefit of the environment and people.

This document describes the long-term role and responsibilities The Bower can and should take on in developing sustainable communities, and defines the top-line strategic direction of the organisation for the next 3 years.

The 3-pillar organisational model

The Bower's Reuse and Repair Centre's unique organisational model is inherent in its name "Reuse and Repair Centre" and is reflected in the 3 pillars on which the Bower is built:

1. **Creating a sustainable economy**

By collecting and selling preloved goods we not only create a local economy that provides both employment and training opportunities and affordable goods, but we also help build sustainable communities and protect the environment.

The unique aspect that The Bower is adding is that we look beyond the traditional 3Rs of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle through our long-standing commitment to repair and upcycling of goods, expressed by our electronic and furniture repair workshops and recently also our in-house upcycling and production lines as well as our referral service which allows us to divert even more goods from landfill and create more employment opportunities.

2. **Education of the community**

The Bower has consistently invested in education the community via workshops, trainings, support for social enterprises, consignment programs and recently also through inspirational initiatives such as the Repair Café, the Tiny House, an auction and the Christmas tree built with recycled material.

The Bower seeks to match its unique, creative programs and innovative workshops with a robust, long-term education and promotion plan, which utilises its strengths in creativity and inspirational projects to engage and encourage members of the community to participate in our reuse and repair programs and thereby contribute to diverting more waste from landfill.

3. **Partnering with Councils**

Partnering with Councils will provide us with ongoing access to household goods, which is the foundation of our organisational and business model. The Bower has developed a unique partnership model providing Reuse and Referral Services (RRS) which we offer to a large number of Councils

Upgrading the quality of this unique service will not only allow us to continue diverting more goods from landfill than we can process in our store but it will also strengthen our relationship and partnership with Councils. This in turn will allow us to introduce the concept of "user pays" and to request a fair price for an exclusive quality service and thereby move away from the current funding mechanism based on good faith.

Manage the further growth

The 3-pillar organisational model is a strong model in so many ways: the local community wants it, the customers want it, society needs it and the councils want to invest in it.

It's time to move on from the initial concept that reuse and repair organisations are benevolent and altruistic charities that depend on goodwill and donations to survive and instead present ourselves as credible and independent business partners that provide quality services, fulfil a need in society and respond to market needs for which it deserves a fair price

We have hardly scratched the surface of the potential that is out there in terms of reuse, repair and upcycling and we should step up our efforts and claim our share of this unique opportunity for which we have helped pave the way for the last 15 years.

Strategic priorities

What follows is an overview of the top-line strategic priorities for the next 3 years for each of the three pillars.

1. Creating a sustainable economy

Strategic priority: Expanding The Bower's collection and sales capacity

The main limitation for The Bower's further growth is space. Space to store, space to repair and to upcycle goods, and space for display. This is a challenge, which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The following 3 pathways will be introduced in parallel:

- Online sales: initial tests indicate that the potential for online sales is significant. Success in this area will not only increase our reach and actual sales but will also reduce the pressure for additional space.
- Expanding capacity at The Bower in Marrickville: the possibility exists to create more roof space at the front of the building, at the loading bay and in the backyard. This will allow for the display of more goods in a realistic environment and in a safer way and will ultimately also increase our sales.
- Economies of scale: the ultimate response to the growing influx of donated goods (a result of the expansion of our programs) will be the opening of new shopfronts elsewhere. This will allow us to explore the concept of economies of scale by keeping the back office and support services centralised while decentralising the sales points.
- The idea is to gradually and over time create 3 additional shopfronts, North, South and West of the inner city, preferably with the support of a cluster of Councils for each sales point. A central distribution point, serving as a triage, repair and transfer station and as a host for the back office services, including customer service, administration and bookkeeping, will complete the infrastructure and capacity for the Bower.

Depending on funding we will expand our building department to a ReIY department (REuse It Yourself) which includes a building deconstruction and material recuperation service.

2. Education of the community

Strategic priority: Expanding our Community Work

Working with and educating local communities has been essential to the success of The Bower. Community embedding and social inclusion is a vital building block of our organisational model.

It is The Bower's intention to continue these efforts and to expand them by broadening the number of people that have access to the programs we offer and by widening the range of programs.

The Bower's website will become a central communications tool promoting our programs and services. In addition to current features the revamped website will feature:

- a. Integration with other media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, instagram
- b. Online assistance and promotion of referral organisations
- c. Online registration for workshops and membership
- d. An online chat room for repairs and upcycling
- e. Online access to eco-research database
- f. An online shopfront

A large pool of instructors needs to be established and trained and all workshops will, in addition to the specific topic, cover the following educational issues:

- a. Introduce thinking around reusing 2nd hand materials
- b. Discuss the environmental benefit of diverting waste from landfill
- c. Highlight which goods are salvageable and which are not
- d. Stress the benefits for the community by donating, repairing and upcycling goods

Greater promotion of the "107 workspace" at Redfern as a hub for creative people, community groups and work for the dole participants who want to experiment, train and learn about reuse and upcycling of preloved goods and ultimately become players in the sustainable retail sector, needs to occur.

The Bower will continue to promote the consignment section as a flagship program to inspire people and attract customers. Organizing a roadshow, expanding the pool of consignors and The Bower's in-house refurbishing and manufacturing capacity should all be part of the program.

Establishing partnerships with schools and corporates will add a new dimension to the Bower's portfolio. The new school curriculum, which includes sustainability, offers opportunities to introduce workshops and projects for schools. Similarly there are opportunities to set up partnerships with companies to offer our workshops either as teambuilding exercises or as after school care programs for employees' kids.

3. Partnering with councils

Strategic priority: Consolidate and strengthen our relationships with Councils

Long-term arrangements with Councils will not only provide us with ongoing access to household goods, but will also give us financial stability and confidence to invest in the further expansion of our organisational and business model.

The conversion from reporting in volume to reporting in tonnage was an important step to strengthen our relationships with councils. Improving and diversifying our reporting in combination with identifying ways to better promote and expand our RRS service is another important step in that regard.

We will also continue to work with Councils on promotion and environmental education of their residents via workshops and information sharing via websites, magazines and flyers, a service which is highly regarded by Councils and has enormous potential for growth.

The above steps and quality services will allow us to establish long-term business arrangements with councils and to gradually transition our Reuse and Referral Service from a funding agreement to a 'pay for use' agreement with Councils and thereby safeguard our role as an independent organisation.

In a later stage and once the arrangement with local councils have been established and proven to be effective, we should engage in ways to share our knowledge and expertise with more Councils for the benefit of other Australian communities and the environment at large.

Circular economy and triple bottom line reference for strategic decisions

All future initiatives that The Bower undertakes will be viewed through the filter of the circular economy and the triple bottom line framework.

Whether it is for the procurement of goods and services, investment in new projects, in-house waste management systems, upcycling and repair of goods or information and education of the community, the circular economy and the triple bottom line framework will become the Bower's reference point for all future strategic decisions and to measure our success. We will also advocate these issues in social and political fora.

The circular economy promotes a holistic or closed loop and sustainable approach to resource usage and waste management - as opposed to a linear economy, which promotes a take-make-dispose approach. Although The Bower is not in a position to fully implement a circular economy, we will promote it and further develop in-house processes for an exemplary resource recovery program for our own waste management.

The triple bottom line is the chosen framework for the Bower to measure its organisational success for the promotion of sustainable communities. In addition to the social impact we will give equal importance to our environmental and economic performance. Environmental, social and financial sustainability will become the standard way to present, report and evaluate the Bower's work and success. The Bower's governance model to implement the triple bottom line will be based on a participatory management style and on personalised staff and volunteer development programs.