

# Other Opportunities, Upcycling and Add-Ons in the Recycling Sector



There are many business opportunities within the recycling and diversion sector. Recycling businesses generally land into four types: collections, processing, re-manufacture and reuse. Repair is sub-category of reuse that generally supports the mission and spirit of recycling as well. Another concept is upcycling, which means taking a material and re-shaping or re-forming it so its value is greatly increased. Examples of upcycling are taking clothes that may not be suitable for re-sale due to stains or holes and creating new clothes by patching together several pieces of clothing items, or making an Adirondack chair out of old skis, pallets or wood scraps.

In New Mexico, there are many examples of successful businesses in the recycling sector. Many have benefitted by a public-private partnership with their local municipality. Some have created success with a diversified business model, by collecting a variety of materials, by offering collections and then processing, and by providing a regional service. Many have found success by working in collections, processing and re-manufacture. Being open to all possibilities and perhaps melding some of these proposed business models or add-on opportunities will help ensure a strong business.

Important Concepts for Developing a Recycled-Material Business Enterprise:

- Know how and where you will get your materials
- Understand the value of the material you are working with and how your business will provide a service or added-value to that material
- Reach out to local municipal partners
- Evaluate all local, state and federal economic development assistance opportunities
- Understand your niche and projected clients



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## Online Sales of Used Materials

Setting up a business that specializes in selling items on e-commerce websites like eBay or Craigslist can be an easy startup business model, and lucrative when materials are found at garage sales or thrift stores. The model could also include a store-front, where the public comes to "consign" their used goods. Once items sell, the business takes a percentage as the broker of that sale.

## Jams & Jellies From Bruised Fruit

Every local farmer and grocery store must manage bruised fruits. Consider squeezing value from these fruits rather than paying to toss them in the trash. The food items can be composted, but a value added opportunity can be making a business of producing jams and jellies with these food items. It is essential to have a regular source of bruised fruit and a customer base.

## Textile Upcycling

Clothing that is stained, torn or has holes may prevent that item from selling at a resale store. These items can be valued by creating new pieces of clothing, dog clothes, purses, tablecloths, napkins, etc. A successful business enterprise could upcycle damaged cashmere sweaters and create beautiful designer-style sweaters, dresses, scarves or doggie sweaters.

## Papercrete

The basic constituents for this product are water, Portland Cement and any type of paper. Papercrete can be poured, slip formed, formed as blocks or tilt-up panels and made into roof tiles. The relatively low cost of production and start-up could be alluring for an entrepreneur, but only potential markets have been identified. One would need to work on developing a mass market first, before creating the product. The largest potential market for Papercrete blocks is as in-fill for homes.

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# Opportunities

## Existing Recycling or Reuse Business Expansion

Expanding an existing business be it a local thrift store, recycling collections business or even a business enterprise that is not currently in the recycling field are all viable possibilities.

## Recycling Collections Expansion

If a business already exists collecting recyclables, are there avenues for expansion? Collecting traditional recyclables items such as paper, cardboard and containers from the business community or residential customers are certainly options. Expanding into food waste collections, yard waste collection, paper shredding services, electronics collections or large item donation collections are all possibilities that can be evaluated.

## Adding Repair as a Service

In the past, repair operations were much more common than they are now. Existing businesses that already handle retail items for sale, can consider adding a repair component to their services. Repairing or just painting can easily bring a new life to old furniture. Consider hiring artists or volunteers who love to tinker.

## Used Cooking Oil to Biodiesel

Reunity Resources is a 501c3 non-profit organization with a zero waste mission: it's their goal to reunite the waste streams with value for the community. They are dedicated to educating about, implementing and promoting zero waste programs. They have been working in the Santa Fe area for 4 years to facilitate recycling and reuse from area restaurants. Their sustaining program at present is the Biofuel Collective. They collect used cooking oil from approximately 90 local restaurants, recycle it into ASTM-certified biodiesel and then redistribute clean, renewable fuel to northern New Mexico. The BioFuel Collective reduces our community's waste stream by over 500 tons of CO2 annually, reduces dependence on foreign oil and creates local jobs. They also educate about and advocate for closed-loop recycling systems and the use of alternative fuels. Through Reunity Resources' advocacy, the City of Santa Fe began using 5% biodiesel in all its diesel fleet vehicles in May 2013. They've also recently diversified operations to include providing local restaurants with compost collection services. Contact Reunity Resources to learn more and receive technical assistance consultation and training on bio-diesel conversion as a business enterprise. [www.reunityresources.com](http://www.reunityresources.com)

## Worm Farming

Growing worms as a business could be a great complement to a compost and mulch business or an existing farm. Selling worms to home composters is a great add-on business. Marketing worms at local farmer's markets and community events are good starting places. Worm composting creates a rich soil amendment that works great on home gardens.



## Thrift Store Expansion

Reuse retail establishments are already familiar with managing recycled materials with an eye towards gleaming value out of that material. Could the thrift store add a repair service as a new service offering? Perhaps you can look towards upcycling some of the materials into new saleable products. Investing in some sewing machines and hiring a few creative seamstresses could create a whole new line of upcycled clothing that can be sold as part of the thrift store offerings or in other specialty clothing stores.

Consider having a designer on staff that scours items not fit for sale for upcycling. This could include turning old belts into cuff bracelets, melting and casting crayons for new multi-color art wands, using laser engraving or cutting machines to turn old vinyl records into jewelry, and more. Find local gift stores to sell the upcycled items and help cover the cost of the designer. Telling the story of the project is an important step in marketing. If the funds from sales help support a non-profit, make sure potential customers are aware of this. Who doesn't want to buy cool earrings that kept material out of the landfill and proceeds of which help provide shelter to the area's homeless community?