THE PROGRESS PLAYBOOK

The Urban Outfitters Guide
to Circular Design

UO IN PROGRESS

INTRODUCTION

Circularity has always been part of the Urban Outfitters DNA through Renewal Vintage. Renewal offers a curated edit of pre-loved items sourced by our specialist buyers from around the world.

We're proud of this authentic part of our heritage and our achievements in alternative fibre use, supply chain, material innovations and renewable energy but we know it's not enough. That's why our sustainability strategy is called UO in Progress as we must keep moving forward with a commitment to being more circular.

As 80% of our product's footprint is dictated at the design stage, it felt appropriate that we equip our teams with a new way of thinking about the product they develop. That's why we embarked on an 18-month training and mentorship program with the amazing team at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion.

This playbook is a result of hours of training and collaboration that kickstarted the beginning of a more circular future. Join us on our journey.

TEAM UO IN PROGRESS

JOURNEY TO CIRCULARITY

To meet the needs of our planet we are striving to move away from a ‘take-make-waste’ model and towards a circular economy that keeps the product we design in use for as long as possible.

At Urban Outfitters we focus on circularity through the lens of our four circularity pillars.

Read this guide to join us on our journey

1. LONGEVITY

Creating pieces that will stand the tests of time in our customers’ hearts and their wardrobes.

2. DESIGN INPUTS

Embracing the alternative and the innovative through thoughtful inputs.

3. RECYCLABILITY

Designing with purpose - from one wardrobe to another.

4. WASTE

Honouring our vintage heritage, minimising waste and maximising resource.

UO CIRCULARITY TARGETS

	 LONGEVITY	 DESIGN INPUTS	 RECYCLABILITY	 WASTE
2025	CARE & REPAIR SERIES DURABILITY STUDY	70% ALT FIBRE MIX 250K JEANS WITH 20% POCR	60% MONO-MATERIALS	20% PRODUCT DEVELOPED IN 3D FIT TOOLS
2027	KEY DRIVERS MEETING EXTENDED DURABILITY STANDARDS	85% ALT FIBRE MIX	DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORT EPR	50% PRODUCT DEVELOPED IN 3D FIT TOOLS
2030	ALL PRODUCT MEETING EXTENDED DURABILITY STANDARDS	100% ALT FIBRE MIX	100% WATER-BASED PRINTING TECHNIQUES	-50% CARBON & -30% WATER FROM MATERIALS

THE PRODUCT PRIORITY MATRIX

1. Identify your class
2. Use the icons to see which pillar to prioritise

NUMBER 1 SHOULD BE YOUR TOP PRIORITY

DESIGN INPUTS

LONGEVITY

RECYCLABILITY

WASTE

TIMELESS

CLASS	PRIORITY 1	2	3	4
JEANS				
JERSEY				
WOVENS				
JACKETS				
OUTERWEAR				
INTIMATES				

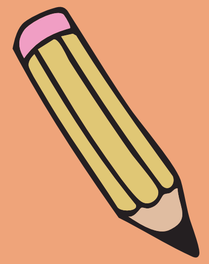
TREND

PRIORITY 1	2	3	4

CIRCULAR SUPERPOWERS

We love it when our teams weave all the circularity pillars into their work but these superpower profiles should help unlock your unique circularity skills. Check your profile to understand your priorities.

DESIGNERS

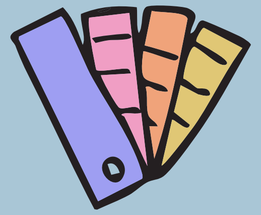


EMOTIONAL LONGEVITY	10
RECYCLABILITY	10
WASTE	8
INPUTS	8

BUYERS

INPUTS	10
RECYCLABILITY	8
WASTE	6
LONGEVITY	4

PRODUCT TECHNOLOGISTS

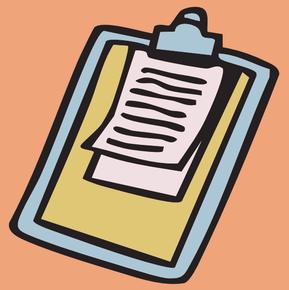


PHYSICAL LONGEVITY	10
WASTE	8
RECYCLABILITY	6
INPUTS	4

MARKETERS

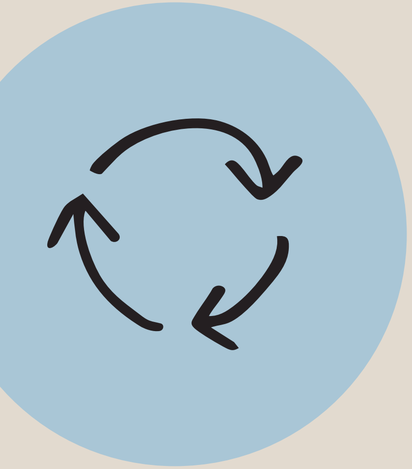
EMOTIONAL LONGEVITY	10
INPUTS	8
RECYCLABILITY	6
WASTE	4

VENDORS



WASTE	10
LONGEVITY	10
INPUTS	8
RECYCLABILITY	7

OUR PILLARS



CIRCULAR DESIGN PILLARS

MEET THE URBAN OUTFITTERS CIRCULARITY PILLARS

These pillars aren't just buzzwords—they're our blueprint for keeping products in circulation longer and reducing their environmental footprint.

Each one is crafted to help us understand a product's purpose and journey, from creation to end-of-life.

Together, they guide us in making smarter and more circular design choices.

DESIGN INPUTS

Embracing the alternative and the innovative through thoughtful inputs

LONGEVITY

Creating pieces that will stand the tests of time both in our customers' hearts and their wardrobes

RECYCLABILITY

Designing with purpose - from one wardrobe to another

WASTE

Honouring our vintage heritage, minimising waste and maximising resource

DESIGN INPUTS

CONCEPTION

- Design your range to meet the urban outfitters alternative fibre target
- Research the feel, construction and drape of some alternative fabrics in our buyerarchy and see what suits your design
- Know what your vendors have to offer in terms of alternative fabric options
- Consider the purpose

IMPLEMENTATION

- Collaborate with vendors who offer alternative options
- Choose the option that fits your budget best (yes some are cost neutral)
- Don’t shy away from asking for blends of alternative fibres with conventional when 100% isn’t an option
- Support vendors offering alternative inputs
- Prioritise high volume lines to maximise impact reduction

FINISHING

- Talk to your vendors about lower impact finishing options such as dope dying, cold pad batch dying, ozone and laser dry finishing
- Consider herbal and mineral dyes and colourants
- Consider the trims, can these be made from recycled contents or mono material with the fabric

TRACKING

- Once we are using great alternative options, it’s super important that we track and certify them
- Use step to attribute all alternative choices
- Each choice will need to be validated by the relative documentation
- Refer to our certificates handbook to find out what you need

BUYERARCHY

Raw material production can have varying environmental and social intensity, which is why we've produced this fibre buyerarchy for our teams to understand how we rank different fibres.

When choosing material inputs, think of this buyerarchy as your cheat sheet for making informed decisions. Wherever possible, we encourage choosing fibres from the 'circular', 'preferred' or 'better' categories.

MATERIAL	CIRCULAR	PREFERRED	BETTER	AVOID
NATURAL FIBRE		RECYCLED COTTON (PRE & POST-CONSUMER)	BETTER COTTON	COTTON
		REGENERATIVE COTTON	US COTTON TRUST PROTOCOL	LINEN
		ORGANIC COTTON	FSC LINEN	
		EUROPEAN HEMP	EU FLAX	
MAN MADE CELLULOSIC FIBRES	REFIBRA	LENZING ECOVERO	FSC VISCOSE	VISCOSE
	INFINNA	LENZING TENCEL		MODAL
	NUCYCL	LENZING MODAL BIRLA SPINNOVA		LYOCELL
		RECYCLED WOOL	RWS WOOL	WOOL
ANIMAL FIBRE		REGENERATIVE WOOL ZQ & ZQRX	LWG LEATHER	LEATHER
		RECYCLED SILK	RAS ALPACA	SILK ALPACA
SYNTHETIC FIBRE	CYCORA	BIOBASED PU	RECYCLED POLYESTER	
	ECONYL	RECYCLED ELASTANE	RECYCLED POLYAMIDE RECYLCED ACRYLIC	
RENEWAL	VINTAGE	DEADSTOCK	REMAKE	

EXAMPLES

CHOOSING THE ALTERNATIVE, THE INNOVATIVE AND THE CONSIDERED INPUTS

100% RECYCLED PUFFER

The iets frans… women's puffer is made of 100% recycled polyester. This includes the outer, lining and even the filling!

Did you know that every piece of plastic ever created still exists on Earth in some form? Using recycled polyester utilises plastic already in existence and reduces the impact of virgin polyester production on our environment. Using recycled polyester in place of virgin polyester keeps synthetic materials in use and out of landfill for longer.

LENZING SEAMLESS

Providing biodegradable and compostable fibres using responsibly sourced wood and pulp.

Conventional viscose relies on wood pulp from forests all over the world to create cellulose fibres by dissolving the pulp in solvents and extruding them into fibres. Lenzing ensures that the wood used is from replenished local forests and the chemicals are used in a closed loop system preventing any toxic discharge from the process.

EMOTIONAL LONGEVITY

DEVELOPING PRODUCTS WITH AUTHENTIC DESIGN THAT WILL BE LOVED FOR LONGER

END USE

- Know your customer. What do they expect from this product?
- Consider multi use functionality
- Offer leg or body lengths or design with adjustable constructions to allow for changes over time

VALUE

- Have you offered spare parts or trims in the event of any mishaps?
- Can the product be customised, adapted or repurposed to add value at the end of its first life?
- Check out our care and repair guide...

TIMELESS DESIGN

- Consider how a product can transcend multiple seasons
- Lean into our vintage heritage and consider timeless prints and colour pallets
- Consider multiple ways to wear or day to night dressing

FIT

- Test your concept on an avatar using our 3d software
- Use known blocks that have already been fit tested
- Restricted movement or discomfort can prevent wear so ensure key products are thoroughly fitted and user trialled and feedback actioned

PHYSICAL LONGEVITY

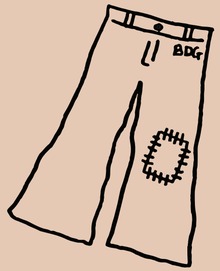
KEEPING PRODUCTS IN CIRCULATION LONGER BY ENSURING THEY ARE FIT FOR THEIR WEARING PURPOSE AND MEET QUALITY EXPECTATIONS

MATERIAL INPUTS

- Are the material and trim qualities fit for the intended end use?
- Does the product need a functional finish - water proof, breathable?
- Use known material and components sources that meet our quality expectations
- Used this material before? Review returns feedback

PILOT NEW MODELS

- Consider possible reuse options
- Partner with factories on zero deficit lines
- Consider repair or upcycle partnerships



QUALITY AND CONSTRUCTION

- Does the factory have the capabilities to make your design?
- Consider reinforcing weak areas with fusing, backing or bar tacks
- Use appropriate seam constructions and minimum make standards
- Ensure that factories have adequate quality inspection measures

TESTING

- Ensure materials meet our testing requirements and reconstruct or rework if they don’t
- Use wearer trials to assess performance
- Extend wash trials (30-50 washes) to challenge a products longevity
- Make products with easy care for the customer
- Consider yarn performance - especially when using recycled cellulosic. Does the tensile strength meet virgin standards?

EXAMPLES

CREATING PIECES THAT WILL STAND THE TESTS OF TIME BOTH IN OUR CUSTOMERS' HEARTS AND THEIR WARDROBES

CARE AND REPAIR

Up to 35% of a product's impact is in the customer use phase.

In 2024, we launched the first customer-facing care and repair guide. The series offers our customers practical guidance on how to laundry like a pro as well as sharing top tips from our in-house quality team.

The aim: keep products fresher for longer and increase the lifespan of our items in the process.

CHECK OUT THE GUIDE HERE!

UO CARE + REPAIR

MODULAR DESIGN

Our in-house design teams spent 18 months working with the center for sustainable fashion on a circular design and mentorship program.

One of their strategies was to consider multi use or multi wear products.

Our amazing casual designers produced a bag that dupes as a skirt.

To top it off, the product was made using 20% recycled cotton.

MULTI USE

RECYCLABILITY

DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE FROM ONE WARDROBE TO ANOTHER

FIBRE SELECTION

- Mono-material products are easier to recycle than blended fibres, as they can be processed using a single method
- Avoid elastane, blended, and poor-quality fibres that lead to excess waste
- Recycled natural fibres retain a significant portion of their original quality, especially when recycled mechanically

LABELLING

- Clearly communicate design choices on labels so consumers and recycling facilities know how to handle the product
- RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Technology) can be attached to products or their packaging to identify their materials, helping with automated sorting processes

PROCESSING

- Verify with your suppliers whether they use additives, coatings and dye-stuffs; chemicals can disturb recycling processes
- 55% of our suppliers are ZDHC or Oeko-Tex compliant. Consider these suppliers when designing for recyclability
- Synthetic dyes may be difficult to remove when recycling. CONSIDER alternative dyestuffs with vegetable dyes, or natural dyestuffs like coffee and myrobalan fruit

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

- Reduce features like fastenings, stitching threads, trimmings, bondings, silicone prints and heat transfers
- Consider modular designs that can be taken apart easily
- Use threads and finishings that match the primary fabric material to avoid contamination

COMP YOUR COMPS

FIBRE TYPE	FIBRE MIX	RECYCLABLE
COTTON	100% COTTON	YES
	98% COTTON 2% OTHER	YES
	95% COTTON 5% OTHER	YES
	80% COTTON 20% OTHER	NO
	<60% COTTON 40% OTHER	NO
POLYESTER	100% POLYESTER	YES
	98% POLYESTER / 2% OTHER	NO
	95% POLYESTER / 5TH OTHER	NO
	70% POLYESTER / 30% OTHER	NO
	<60% POLYESTER / 40% OTHER	NO
NYLON	100% NYLON	YES

FIBRE TYPE	FIBRE MIX	RECYCLABLE
MMCF (CELLULOSE)	100% MMCF	NO
	50% MMCF / 50% POLYESTER	NO
	<50% MMCF / 50% COTTON	NO
WOOL	100% WOOL	YES
	95% WOOL / 5% OTHER	YES
	<85% WOOL / 15% OTHER	NO
ACRYLIC	100% ACRYLIC	NO

EXAMPLES

DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE FROM
ONE WARDROBE TO ANOTHER

THE DENIM DEAL

Our BDG team have joined the Denim Deal, a band of jean genies who are vouching to work together to close the denim loop by making post-consumer recycled cotton the new norm.

To kick this off, our BDG denim team collaborated with their key mill partners to embed 20% pre-and-post-consumer recycled content into **52%** of their jeans.

We want to show our industry peers and customers that old clothes can be recycled into something new and we're doing just that by giving their old jeans a second life.

In 2023, **95%** of our BDG range used **100%** denim cloths, making them easier to recycle at the end of their useful life!

MONO MATERIALS

In 2024, **54%** of Urban Outfitters EU styles were made from mono-material, meaning they are made from a single type of material. Mono material products are much easier to recycle, as the sorting process is simplified, they can be processed using a single method, and the recycled output tends to be of higher purity.

100% LINEN

100% LYOCELL

MANAGING WASTE

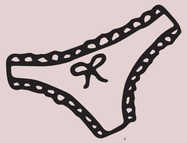
VINTAGE AND REMNANT ARE AT THE CORE OF OUR BRAND'S DNA. HOW CAN WE TAKE THESE PRINCIPLES AND APPLY THEM TO THE REST OF OUR BUSINESS?

PRE AND POST CONSUMER

- Vintage is part of our heritage. We have some amazing partners in our supply chain already- collaborate!
- Factories often have dead stock cloths in their warehouses - use them!
- Use off cuts to create something individual, create a matching accessory or use as part of a community workshop
- Can damages can be up-cycled or reused?
- Consider tech like print on demand

VALUE CREATION

- Create value from cutting waste through cutting waste recycling programs. Prioritise textile recycling before down-cycling
- Consider new business models to encourage the resale of existing goods
- Do you have samples leftover from your development process? What about a sample sale?



SAMPLE REDUCTION

- Use 3d design software to test your design concept
- Once your confident in the design, develop the fit in 3d pattern cutting software-reducing physical samples and the accompanying ghg footprint
- Lean into our vintage heritage and consider timeless prints and colour pallets

WATER, CHEMICALS & CARBON

- Use low impact finishing processes like lazer, ozone or cold pad batch dyeing
- Did you know that 55% of our factories are already zdhc compliant? Reward their investment as a key partner
- Use water-based or organic dyestuffs
- Know your vendor - can they convert any of their process to better… water recycling plants, solar energy, improved dying methods?

EXAMPLES

FROM EXPLORING OUR VINTAGE HERITAGE TO LOOKING AT NEW INNOVATION TECHNIQUES, HERE ARE SOME OF THE WAYS WE'RE CHALLENGING OURSELVES

VINTAGE

Vintage is part of our heritage and dates back to the 1970's when vintage and dead-stock was sold in our very first store in Philadelphia, USA.

Today, our specialist vintage buyers source one-of-a-kind pieces to form curated ranges in our stores and on site.

The original store also featured the 'free bin' where customers could swap their unwanted items withother customers.

URBAN OUTFITTERS

3D PATTERN CUTTING

In 2024, we invested in Clo 3D Pattern Cutting software.

Clo allows our teams to review their designs on a 3D avatar before actioning any samples. So far, we have reduced our sampling per style by c.50% and actioned Clo developed on 20% of our womenswear range.

Not only are we reducing samples, but we're also reducing the number of packages being sent to our UK office and therefore reducing our footprint in the process.

PRE-CONSUMER COTTON

Our BDG teams collaborated with denim mill Kipas to deliver a collection of jeans made using 100% recycled cutting waste.

The cutting waste is taken from the floors of our key Turkish factories and recycled back into a 100% recycled cotton denim.

100% RECYCLED

THREAD FOR THOUGHT

DESIGN INPUTS

Do you have team targets you are trying to meet?

Does the fabric choice make sense for the product purpose?

Is this product a high-volume line with a large impact?

Can the finishing, printing, dying be lower impact?

Can this product be made using mono-fibres?

Are our vendors already using lower impact methods and we just don't know?

LONGEVITY

Is the product easily repairable?

Can your product be styled multiple ways in marketing to encourage emotional durability?

Consider testing product for purpose, a rain jacket? Send it to a rainy music festival during weather trialling.

Ensure wearer trials are conducted across the size range. What may be a weak spot in one size may go undetected if not considered.

RECYCLABILITY

Can any of the product's components be adjusted to make it monofibre?

Are there any unnecessary features like fastenings and trimmings that can be removed?

Can you make this product more modular?

Have you considered alternative dye-stuffs?

Do your threads and finishings match your primary fibre material?

Have you checked whether your suppliers are using chemical additives or coatings?

WASTE

Separate waste by colour and composition

Clearly bale/ label for easy sorting and recycling

Consider the waste hierarchy- upcycle, recycle, downcycle... In that order!

Identify local mill partners that can recycled back into yarn or cloth for use in your production

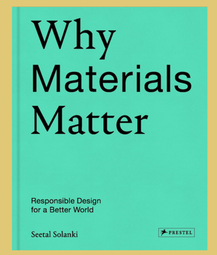
Consider infrastructure changes to accommodate this different approach

Know the law - can you import or export waste across borders? Be aware of incoming changes to maximize the longevity of any partner relationships

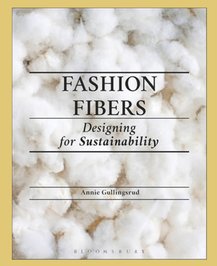
RECOMMENDED READING

*Please note Urban Outfitters is not affiliated with any of the below publications.

DESIGN INPUTS



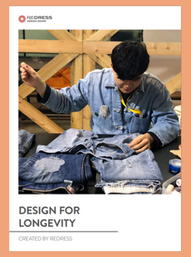
Why Materials Matter
Responsible Design for a Better World
By Seetal Solanki



Fashion Fibers
Designing for Sustainability
By Annie Gullingsrud

LONGEVITY

Loved Clothes Last
How the joy of re-wearing and repairing your clothes can be a revolutionary act
By Orsola de Castro



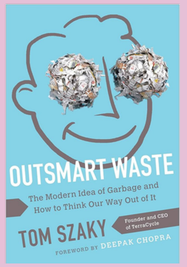
Design for Longevity
Guidance on increasing the active life of clothing
By WRAP

RECYCLABILITY

Cradle to Cradle
Re-making the way we make things
By Michael Braungart and William McDonough

Textile Recycling and Recovery
An Eco-friendly Perspective on Textile and Garment Industries Challenges
By Textile Research Journal

WASTE



Outsmart Waste
The Modern Idea of Garbage and How to Think Our Way Out of It
By Tom Szaky

Waste Management in the Fashion and Textile Industries
By Rajkishore Nayak & Asis Patnaik

THANK YOU!

To create The Progress Playbook, we've gathered tools from all around us, from industry peers, research experts and learnings from our own teams.

While we recognise that circular innovations are constantly evolving, and the industry is forever growing, this is just the beginning and another step of our progress to do better.

Thanks to Centre of Sustainable Fashion who have joined us on this journey and to team Urban Outfitters for their commitment to change.

TEAM UO IN PROGRESS