

# Tote Bag Workshops

ADVOCATE PLASTIC BAG BAN







# Upskill your community to go plastic bag free

Greece has the highest per capita use of plastic bags in the EU. Across Greece, plastic bags (along with plastic bottles and aluminium cans) make up 50% of all marine litter. Despite new charges, plastic bag use is still the norm in a lot of coastal areas.

By engaging with and upskilling your community to create tote bags using waste material like end-of-life linen and old clothes, you can apply circular design thinking to solve two problems in one.



“

Common Seas is really investing in the fact that everyone can do simple and easy things to rethink, reuse, reduce, to avoid using plastic, minimise waste production, and therefore protect the island environment.”

Marie-Astrid Herault Bourget  
Vineyard Owner & French Language tutor,  
Mother of two, Paros

## Contents

### This toolkit contains:

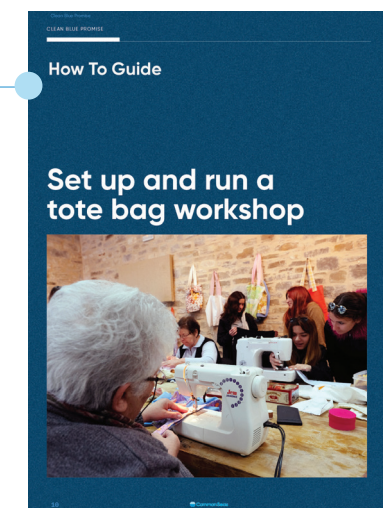
#### Case Study.

Empowering Paros to go plastic bag free. Use this to understand how the intervention works and to convince others to support your project.



#### How To.

Use this to set up your project and achieve long term impact.



#### Tote Bag Tutorial [Video](#)

#### Tote Bag Time Warp [Video](#)

### What you'll need:

1. Location
2. Equipment
3. Our [pattern](#)
4. A skilled sewer
5. Snacks





## Case Study

# Empowering Paros to go plastic bag free



**In Greece, people use on average 300 plastic bags per year. That's almost one new, non-recyclable plastic bag every day!**

We believe every member of society can make a difference by making small, simple changes to their behaviour. That's why our team on Paros ran workshops to teach local people how to sew their own reusable tote bags, made from locally sourced waste material.

## Problem

**Greece has the highest per capita use of plastic bags in the EU. Despite an 85% reduction in plastic bag use since the introduction of a 9c tax, bags still pose a very real threat to the environment. For example, they're often blown out to sea, causing harm to animals above and below water.**

**Greece has the highest per capita use of plastic bags in the EU.**





## Solution

**On Paros, we set up a series of fun, hands-on workshops inviting people of all ages, skill sets and backgrounds to learn how to make their own tote bags.**

Inspired by the work of Boomerang Bags, this project supports circular economy design and creativity, while making space to share skills between generations. These workshops encourage participants to rethink their habits in a positive way, rather than just feeling guilty.

Our team partnered with hotel laundry services to source and repurpose end-of-life linens that would otherwise go to waste. Participants were also encouraged to bring old clothes and scrap fabric that they would otherwise be throwing away.

The workshops were easy to manage, and were hosted in various locations, mostly using borrowed or donated equipment. You'll find more below on the exact tools and set-up you'll need to run your own.

This project can also provide an opportunity to work with schools, associations and groups, as more organisations look for ways to play their part in environmentally-impactful activities



## Outcome

**So far, we have run 15 workshops on Paros, equipping 60 volunteers with the skills and knowledge to create reusable bags to use themselves, give to local businesses or pass on to others. During COVID, we also made a video to reach new audiences online.**

If we assume that every volunteer who attended a Paros workshop uses their tote bags to do about half of their shopping, this simple project will save around 15,000 plastic bags from being used every single year.



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## How To Guide

# Set up and run a tote bag workshop



## 1. Locate a venue to host your workshop

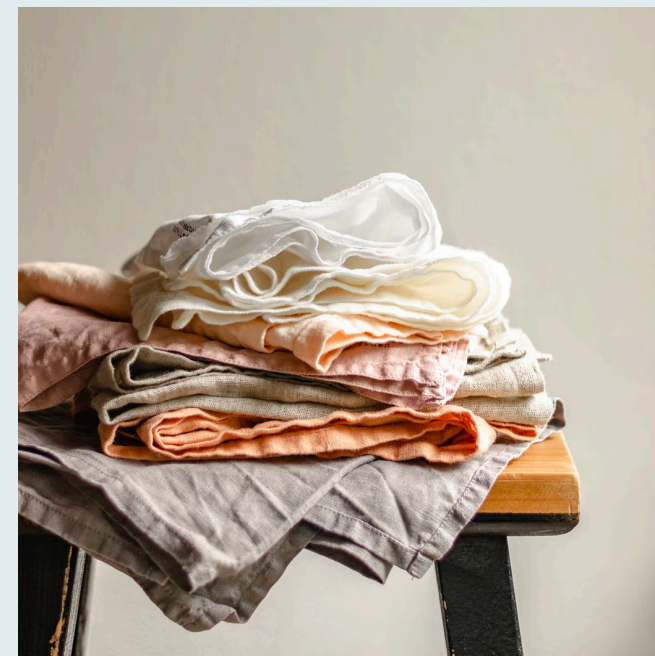
Access to tables and electricity are the most important factors so people have somewhere to plug in and use sewing machines.

## 2. Source your materials

Work with local businesses (particularly hotels) to repurpose fabrics like bed linen or tablecloths.

You can also encourage attendees to bring in their own material to use e.g. unused clothing. This is so much better for the environment than using virgin materials.

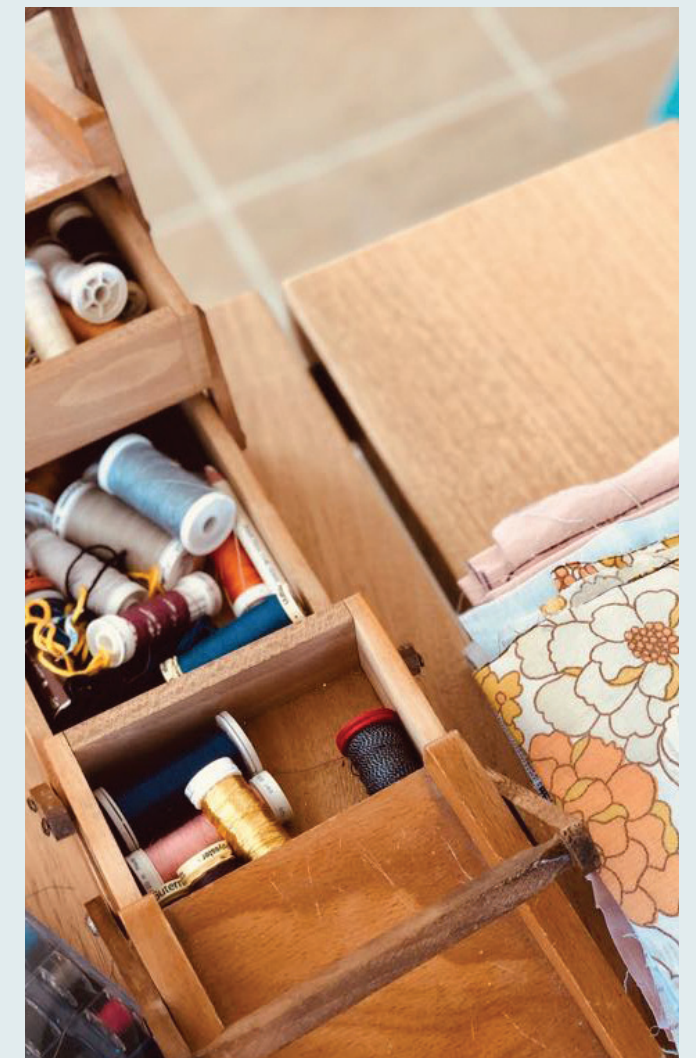
**Hotels are a great place to start: An EU Directive requires that bed linen is removed from service as soon as it shows any wear.**



## 3. Allocate plenty of time

The Paros workshops ran for three to four hours with another hour needed to set up and clean down.

You may need more or less time depending on the size of your group and their skill level.





## 4. Organise your equipment

You will need:

### Sewing Machines



Aim to use borrowed and donated machines or those brought by participants.

A basic sewing machine costs about €140.

### Instructor

At least one skilled sewer, but ideally a few more!



### Pattern

Our pattern [pdf](#)  
3-minute how to [video](#)



### Sewing kit basics

Good fabric scissors, thread, pins, needles, measuring tape



### Iron and ironing board



### Power strips



### Snacks

Some coffee, treats, and water for volunteers



! For larger groups, you need about one sewing machine per two participants.

## 5. Connect with local businesses, schools, and organisations

From gathering material to increasing attendee interest, this intervention is a great way to work alongside local institutions to spread the message about avoiding plastic bags.

## 6. Promote your events

On Paros, we told local associations about our events and used Facebook to announce upcoming workshops and post regular reminders.

You might want to use other channels like email, Instagram and Twitter as well as local press and radio.

## 7. Run the workshop

On Paros, we started each workshop with a short talk about why we there, emphasising that tote bags made from repurposed fabrics are much better for the environment than bags made from virgin materials.

We also showed the video so people knew how the day would go.

## 8. Distribute your bags far and wide

Surplus bags can be given to local shops and businesses for free or in return for donations towards future workshops.

The aim of this intervention is to get more people using reusable bags so don't hold back getting them out there!



# A few tips

KEEP IT SIMPLE

*If you're running workshops with schools or groups of young children, keep it simple. On Paros, we gave a quick demonstration and then invited children to leave an old pillowcase to be made into bags that they could collect later.*

SEWING NOT NEEDED

*If lots of people attend the events who can either not sew or simply don't want to, they can sort out the donated fabrics, cut the pieces needed for the bag and handles, or iron.*

PROMOTION

*Why not include a local emblem or project logo on the bags to showcase the initiative and help with the promotion of future events?*

NOURISHMENT

*Bring snacks and drinks to your events!*

KEEP IT NATURAL

*Choose non-stretchy, sturdy materials. Natural fabric like cotton works really well.*

EXPERIENCE

*Depending on the number of participants for each workshop, you will need an experienced sewer, or several, to demonstrate the techniques and process.*

INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM WORK

*You will need an individual or small team to deliver each event. Their role will be to manage the attendees, venue, equipment and sewers alongside general admin and event promotion.*

RUN THROUGH

*We suggest you run through the sewing process before your first workshop. Download our tote bag pattern and [click here](#) to watch our 3-minute online tutorial video.*



## 9. Measure your impact

Record the number of participants and how many bags are made and distributed. You could include a survey after the event to find out how often people used their tote bag instead of over plastic bags.





CLEAN BLUE PROMISE

x *2 Promise*

EST. 2022



# Thank you

