

# ESTABLISHING CIRCULARITY FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONTAINERS

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2023

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Dart Container wants to expand its sustainability efforts by implementing a circularity program to collect, aggregate, and distribute used containers back into the manufacturing process or foodservice supply chain. Collected materials may be cleaned and reused or may be destined for recycling and remanufacturing. Regardless of the endpoint for the reclaimed containers, Dart hopes to prevent a portion of the millions of pounds of single use containers from ending up in landfills or incinerators.

## OUTCOME & RESULTS

Dart Container, the global leader in food and beverage packaging, is used by individual consumers and institutions worldwide. The materials used in its products span a broad range from molded fiber and paper to various plastics. While the majority of the materials are technically recyclable or compostable, the perceived single-use nature of the containers means that most of the items are disposed of as refuse, exiting the supply chain. Consequently, any effort to reverse that flow of materials would be complex and highly variable in scale.

In 2023, Dart Container contacted TechConnect regarding their interest in improving the overall sustainability of their product offerings. Specifically, Dart wanted to identify collaboration partners with expertise in reverse logistics to facilitate the collection of products post-consumer. By reclaiming post-consumer products, Dart Container could evaluate each item and determine a more sustainable outcome: cleaning and reuse or recycling into new source materials.

As the program administrator, TechConnect was responsible for all aspects of the innovation effort. The TechConnect team, working in close consultation with representatives from Dart, designed the public-facing project page. Furthermore, it was at the recommendation of TechConnect that Dart Container participated in an informational webinar for the project, hosted by TechConnect. TechConnect provided a comprehensive spectrum of outreach to the global innovation community including social media, direct email messages to the extensive TechConnect network, as well as targeted outreach to new individuals and organizations with relevant technologies or expertise. The intent of the outreach effort, regardless of pathway, was to raise awareness of and interest in the project.

Through this project, Dart Container identified several organizations, inside and outside the United States, with whom to collaborate on a circularity initiative. TechConnect is proud to play a role in assisting our clients improve the sustainability of their operations, providing benefits to all.

## TESTIMONIAL

TechConnect is an extension of both our engineering department and our business unit teams. With the TechConnect sprint services, we can locate viable solution partners for both highly technical problems and new business opportunities in a timely fashion and with little resource drain on our end.

- **Todd Atkins**  
Engineering Senior  
Project Manager,  
Dart Container

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DIRECT  
ENGAGEMENTS

45.5%

HAVE A  
COMMERCIAL  
PRODUCT

18.2%

HAVE PROVEN MANUFACTURABILITY

4

PITCHES

55%

AT  
TRL 9

4

COUNTRIES  
REPRESENTED

36.4%

SEED STAGE  
STARTUPS

15

APPLICANTS

18.2%

AT TRL 7