

# Support Local BC Harnesses the Power of Collaboration to Keep Businesses Afloat During Pandemic



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## SYNOPSIS

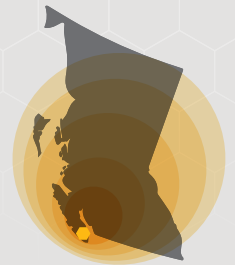
Collaboration is the name of the game for Michèle Hamilton, Managing Director of Think Local First and Support Local BC. When her Shopify platform, Support Local YYJ, started to take off, the inquiries for partnerships came rolling in and she brought many partners on board to support small businesses during the pandemic.

## LOCATION

Throughout B.C.

## INNOVATORS

Think Local First



## INTRODUCTION

With so many businesses having to close their doors during the pandemic, their cashflow was tighter than ever.

By developing the Support Local BC website, there was an opportunity to address this challenge by bringing cash straight to the businesses through gift certificate purchases.

Through collaboration with various Trusts, economic development organizations and shop local initiatives throughout B.C., this platform has grown to provide value to businesses that have been struggling in the current climate.



## THE OPPORTUNITY

In Victoria, B.C., [Think Local First](#), run by Michèle Hamilton is a non-profit geared towards supporting local small businesses.

Through mixers, cross-promotion and marketing materials, it encourages consumers in the Greater Victoria area to shop local.

When COVID-19 hit, the Think Local First team built on its existing

platform by creating Support Local YYJ: a [Shopify](#)-hosted website where people can buy gift certificates to their favourite local businesses, all in one place.

Once that initiative gained momentum, there was yet another opportunity to grow, work with other energized organizations and support small businesses on a larger scale – it's called [Support Local BC](#).

## THE STRATEGY

It all began with Think Local First and its mission to build a more vibrant and sustainable Greater Victoria.

Innovation and collaboration are core principles in the organization, so it was only natural to continue to expand the brand by exploring [Shopify's](#) availability to sell gift certificates to local businesses.



As a spin off brand to Think Local First, the website Support Local YYJ was created. This platform worked with businesses in the existing membership of Think Local to populate the site. The incentive? That members of the public could do all their shopping and gift buying in one spot, that they could support small local businesses – and that the Support Local YYJ team would absorb all of the administrative costs of the transactions.

Support Local YYJ had great success and was continuing to grow when COVID-19 hit, having a massive effect on the B.C. economy. Always willing to collaborate, the Support Local YYJ team worked with several communities, shop local campaigns and trusts to expand the initiative and build an online store to include businesses all over B.C., renaming the platform to Support Local B.C.

The membership structure asks that each local government pay a one-time fee of \$1,275 to register up to 100 local businesses on the platform. Also, business must meet certain eligibility requirements to be included on the site, like not being part of a franchise. The program is also supported through sponsorships by a number of community partners including [Vancity](#), [Love Northern BC](#), [BC Economic Development Association](#), and [LOCO BC](#).

As the program continues to grow and expand, groups like [Fortis BC](#) have offered volunteers to staff the call centre and answer questions, and BC Buy Local are heading up the outreach strategy, to share the workload!

Looking ahead to the future of the platform, the Support Local BC team is eager to take this initiative, created specifically for COVID-19 response, and turn it into a long-term resource. They plan to continue to collaborate on ways to make the space meaningful and helpful for small local businesses throughout the province.



## SUCCESSES

- 65 communities have registered as part of the Support Local BC platform
- 1189 businesses currently have gift cards for sale on the website
- Over \$80,000 has been raised province-wide since the creation of the Support Local brand
- The success of the program has been so overwhelming that even though it was created as a COVID-19 response tool, there are now plans to make it a permanent resource for B.C. businesses



## LESSONS LEARNED

- Get feedback from users to help refine your product
- Bring in professionals to work on the tasks you are not confident doing
- Touch base with the businesses you're working with regularly to make sure the initiative's marketing campaigns aren't competing for airtime
- Better together is always the motto: collaboration is truly the key to success

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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For more information, visit [gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment](https://gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment)

