

RESTARTING STALLED FOOD PROJECTS

“Should we revive or restart a stalled food project?””

Created for: Indigenous leader or entrepreneur who would like to take a stalled food project and breathe new life into it.

Purpose: This tool helps communities thoughtfully assess food or agriculture initiatives that never reached their full potential, or projects that have stalled and may now be ready to move forward again.

In your community, there may be equipment that is not currently operating as intended. This may include:

- Greenhouses or container-based growing systems;
- Community gardens / farms; or
- Equipment for cooking / processing food.

Projects may stall because of factors such as:

- Leadership or staffing transitions;
- Unattainable funding timelines;
- Operational challenges;
- Unclear governance roles;
- Unexpected events or disasters; or
- Project vision not matching existing interests or skills in the community.

With time, conditions may change, and the project may be viable again.

This tool helps decision-makers ask:

- Should we restart this project?
- Should we redesign it?
- Should we partner with others?
- Or should we respectfully close it?

The goal is to move forward with clarity rather than repeating past barriers.



A Trauma-Informed Perspective

Projects that stall can sometimes carry emotional weight for communities, leaders, or project champions.

People may feel:

- Disappointment
- Frustration
- Embarrassment
- Caution about trying again

It is important to recognize that stalled initiatives are not failures, they are sources of information. Many successful food initiatives have required multiple attempts, pivots, and redesigns before becoming sustainable.

Reflection

Learning from what happened in the past is a form of leadership.

Re-examining a project is not about blame; it is about gaining wisdom.

Guidance Questions

This guide will help to answer:

1. What do we need to know about the project's history?
2. Does the project still align with community priorities?
3. What assets or equipment already exist?
4. Who is interested in leading the project?
5. Is there a solid business plan in place?
6. Should the project be restarted or not?

A colour coding system can help us gain clarity at a glance:



Clear



Some unknowns



Unclear



Question 1: What do we need to know about the project's history?


What happened before?


Before restarting any initiative, it is helpful to understand its original purpose and what caused it to stall. Projects rarely stop because of a single issue. Often several conditions overlap.

Reflection Questions:

- What was the original goal of the project?
- What investments were made (buildings, equipment, land improvements)?
- What stage did the project reach?
- Why did it stop progressing?
- Were the barriers operational, financial, governance-related, or logistical?

Scoring:

History is clearly understood: GREEN 

Some information missing: YELLOW 

The reasons for the stall are unclear: RED 

If yellow or red:

Consider speaking with previous project leads, reviewing past grant documents, and consulting community members who were involved. Understanding the past helps prevent repeating it.

Question 2: Does the project still align with community priorities?

Community priorities evolve over time. A project that aligned strongly five years ago may need to be reconsidered or reframed today.


Reflection Questions:

Does this project support:

- Food security or food sovereignty?
- Community health and wellness?
- Employment or training opportunities?
- Youth engagement or cultural knowledge sharing?
- Environmental stewardship?
- Economic development opportunities?

Scoring:

Strong alignment with current priorities: GREEN 

Partial alignment with current priorities: YELLOW 

Weak alignment with current priorities: RED 

If yellow or red:

If alignment is weak, the project may need reframing or redesign.



Question 3: What assets or equipment already exist?


What does the community already have in place?

One advantage of reviving stalled initiatives is that infrastructure may already be in place.


Reflection questions:

- What assets exist (greenhouses, irrigation, fencing, processing equipment, etc.)?
- What condition are they in?
- Are repairs required?
- Are utilities available (water, power, internet)?
- Are there ongoing maintenance costs?

Scoring:

Infrastructure is ready or can be easily repaired: GREEN 

Moderate upgrades are required: YELLOW 

Significant infrastructure barriers exist: RED 

If red:

The community may wish to explore alternative uses, phased reactivation, or decommissioning / removing the equipment.

Question 4: Who is interested in leading this project?


Who will actually run this project?

Many initiatives stall because roles and responsibilities were unclear.

Reflection Questions:

- Who will manage day-to-day operations?
- Is there a project champion or operator?
- Are staff or volunteers available?
- Are training opportunities needed?

Scoring:

Clear operational leadership: GREEN 

Leadership is possible but not yet confirmed: YELLOW 

No clear operator has been identified: RED 

If red:

Identifying a project lead should be the next step before further investment.



Question 5: Is there a solid business plan in place?


Financial assumptions may change over time.

Reflection Questions:


- Was there an original business plan?
- Are the assumptions in that plan still realistic?
- What are the operating costs?
- Is funding available to restart operations?
- Could the project restart at a smaller scale?

Clear business planning strengthens projects. Realistic numbers build trust with leadership and funders.

Scoring:

Financial model is realistic: GREEN 

Financial projections should be revisited before restarting the project: YELLOW 

Financial viability is unclear: RED 

If red:

Financial projections should be revisited before restarting the project.

Question 6: Should the project be restarted or not?

After reviewing each section, communities may want to use the following matrix to guide decision-making.

Project Conditions	Recommended Pathway	Next Steps
<p>Mostly GREEN Strong values alignment, equipment is usable, project leader is available</p>	<p>Restart the Project</p>	<p>Proceed with the project largely as originally envisioned.</p>
<p>Several YELLOW Alignment strong but operations or finances need adjustment</p>	<p>Pivot or Redesign the Project</p>	<p>Modify the scale, purpose, or operations.</p>
<p>Several YELLOW and RED Infrastructure or expertise gaps exist but interest remains</p>	<p>Explore Partnerships to Move Forward with Support</p>	<p>Collaborate with a nonprofit, entrepreneur, or another community.</p>
<p>Mostly RED Major barriers remain and alignment is weak</p>	<p>Close the Project</p>	<p>Acknowledge that conditions are not right and respectfully close the project.</p>



REFLECTION EXERCISE

Complete one of the following sentences:

- “We should restart this project because...”
- “This project would be stronger if we redesigned it by...”
- “This initiative may be better suited for partnership because...”
- “At this time, it may be best to respectfully release this project because...”

Reviving a stalled project can sometimes be easier than starting over from the beginning: infrastructure already exists and lessons have already been learned.

When communities revisit past initiatives with openness and curiosity, opportunities may be discovered that were simply waiting for the right conditions to emerge.



Example Scenario: Reviving an Abandoned Community Greenhouse

A community received grant funding several years ago to **construct a community greenhouse** with the goal of increasing local food production and creating employment opportunities.

The greenhouse structure was successfully built and basic infrastructure such as irrigation lines and raised beds were installed.

However, the project stalled before operations fully began.

Several factors contributed to the stall:

- The original **project champion or other key staff moved on** to another position.
- There was **uncertainty about which department would manage** the greenhouse.
- **No dedicated staff** were assigned to oversee planting, harvesting, or distribution.
- Leadership **priorities shifted** during an election cycle.

As a result, the greenhouse remained unused for several seasons. Now, new leadership has begun exploring whether the greenhouse could be revived and integrated into the community's broader food security goals.

Using the check list, the community worked through the following five steps. These were their outcomes.



Example Scenario: Reviving an Abandoned Community Greenhouse

Question 1: What Do We Need to Know About the Project's History?

Leadership and staff reviewed past documents, including:

- Original grant proposal;
- Construction invoices; and
- Past Council discussions.

They also spoke with the original project coordinator.

Through this process, Leadership learned that the project had not failed due to lack of interest, but rather due to unclear roles and responsibilities.

This insight helped shift the conversation from “Why didn’t this work?” to “What conditions need to change for this to succeed?”

Question 2: Does the Project Still Align with Community Priorities?

The Nation’s Comprehensive Community Plan identified several priorities that aligned with the greenhouse, including:

- Improving food security;
- Providing employment and training opportunities; and
- Supporting youth land-based learning.

Leadership recognized that the greenhouse could support these goals if the project were redesigned slightly.

Question 3: What Assets or Equipment Already Exists?

A technical review of the greenhouse revealed:

- The structure remains sound;
- Irrigation equipment needs minor repairs; and
- A vegetable wash station was never built but is needed.

These repairs were manageable and far less costly than constructing a new greenhouse.



Example Scenario: Reviving an Abandoned Community Greenhouse

Question 4: Who is Interested in Leading this Project?

Rather than placing responsibility across multiple departments, the Nation decided to assign one project manager within the Economic Development team.

The manager will coordinate:

- Crop planning;
- Volunteer and youth programming; and
- Partnerships with local food organizations.

This clarity helped reduce uncertainty about day-to-day operations.

Question 5: Is There a Solid Business Plan in Place?

The original project assumed that most vegetables would be sold outside of the community. After reviewing community needs, Leadership chose to adjust the model:

- About 20% of vegetables would be donated to support food baskets for Elders;
- About 50% of vegetables would be sold within the community to daycares, schools and health centres; and
- The remaining 30% could be sold at the local farmers' market during weekly market days in two of the neighbouring towns.

In addition, youth programs would use the greenhouse as a training space and receive annual funding from the Nation to ensure basic operational needs are met. This mixed approach reduces financial pressure while still generating modest revenue.

Question 6: Should the Project be Restarted or Not?

By revisiting the project through a structured reflection process, the community determined that the greenhouse should restart with a new purpose and operational plan.

Key changes included:

- Assigning a clear project manager;
- Scaling production gradually; and
- Combining community food programs and different sales channels with modest annual funding.

What had once been viewed as a stalled project became an asset that could support food security, training, and community engagement.

Acknowledgments

This toolkit was developed by Ispahcâw Consulting and Upland Agricultural Consulting. All information is current to 2026.

The project team would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who shared their stories and feedback with us during the development of the toolkit.

Examples used through this toolkit have been gathered with permission or from public-facing documents and websites.

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the governments of Canada and British Columbia. The governments of Canada and British Columbia, and their directors, agents, employees, or contractors will not be liable for any claims, damages, or losses of any kind whatsoever arising out of the use of, or reliance upon, this information.



Funded in part by the governments of Canada and British Columbia under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.