

# COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT FOR FOOD INITIATIVES

*“Is this project a good fit for the community?”*

**Created for:** Indigenous leadership, Economic Development Commissions, senior staff.

**Purpose:** To determine whether the community should support a proposed food system project.



## Scenario: Seeking support from the community to start a new project

An individual (likely a community member but possibly not) is interested in starting a food system project (for example a market garden, a greenhouse, a livestock and/or chicken operation). They have come forward to seek support from community leadership and/or organizations. The permission they are seeking may be a blessing, a land lease, permits, agreements, and/or investments. The initiative may or may not include the goal of providing food for community members or turning a profit (generating revenues).

In this scenario, there may be several questions for leadership to consider.

This tool is for you if you are in a position to decide whether or not a proposed food system project is a good fit for your community.

## Questions that this tool works through include:

- ✓ Does this project align with our community priorities?
- ✓ What challenges might the project face?
- ✓ Which offices or departments need to be involved?
- ✓ Can we minimize or manage any risks?
- ✓ What approvals might be required?

**Desired Outcome: Clear internal direction and a decision pathway that provides clarity when communicating with the food project entrepreneur.**

Food system stressors and disasters such as flooding and drought, soaring food costs, and supply-chain disruptions continue to place pressure on our access to food. These impacts are felt in many Indigenous communities, particularly those in rural and remote areas. Actions taken toward achieving food security and food sovereignty are practical and often necessary. It is also a sovereign right as articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)* in B.C.

Restoring communities' capacity for self-determined planning toward sustainable food security and food sovereignty is a legislated component of the journey toward Reconciliation.

Many Indigenous communities have woven the sacredness of food throughout their entire community, providing many opportunities for intergenerational knowledge sharing. That context can help guide community decision-makers, such as Chief and Council, Economic Development Organizations, and staff, when working through the following questions.



## Question 1: Does the proposed food project align with our community values and priorities?

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You may find that food projects intersect with community values and priorities in several ways, such as:

- **Self-governance**
- **Health and wellness**
- **Land use**
- **Economic development**
- **Employment**
- **Education**
- **Sustainability**

### CONSIDER: Comprehensive Community Plan

You may want to refer to existing community plans—such as a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), Land Use Plan, or Economic Development Plan—to consider whether the project aligns with community priorities. Where a CCP exists, it can be a helpful starting point, but not all Nations have one, and some plans may be outdated or in development.

Alignment can also be assessed through other sources, including leadership direction, community engagement, and the guidance of Elders and Knowledge Holders, to ensure the project reflects current values and priorities.

## Community Strategic Priorities

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## Community Values

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Many food system projects include multiple strategies that take a holistic approach to community food sovereignty and economic independence, including:

- **Revitalizing** traditional foodways – supporting the legacy of fishing, hunting, agriculture, and gathering food and medicines.
- **Strengthening** local food systems – expanding access to fresh food while reducing reliance on supply chains.
- **Building** community food security - providing food to Elders and other members of the community for free or very low cost.

Connecting Elders, Traditional Knowledge holders, and youth to share knowledge about land-based food systems and environmental stewardship can help uncover priorities and values.

### EXAMPLE: WESTBANK FIRST NATION

WFN's Comprehensive Community Plan is rooted in the story of Four Food Chiefs:

- Chief Bitterroot (spíł̓əm): the Chief for things underground
- Chief Black Bear (skə́m̓xist) : the Chief for all creatures of the land
- Chief Saskatoon Berry (sɪya'ʔ): the Chief for things growing on the land
- Chief Spring Salmon (sklw̓ł̓'is): the Chief for all creatures of the water



## Question 2: Which offices or departments need to be involved and is there a clear pathway to success, supported by processes and policy?

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The following offices may be involved:

- **Band Administration:** to support completing any paperwork involved with creating the new enterprise.
- **Lands Department:** to support any lease arrangements or other land use tenure agreements.
- **Rights and Title Department:** to ensure that land use practices are consistent with protection of air, land, water, wildlife and historical/cultural places.
- **Operations and Maintenance:** for water and utility needs and access.
- **Cultural Department:** to preserve, protect, and restore sites of cultural significance.
- **Economic Development:** to provide support for business planning and explore opportunities for investment.
- **Health and Wellness:** to explore opportunities to weave in active living, preventative, and recovery programming into the food project.
- **Education:** to explore opportunities for land-based learning among members of the community.

### If there is no clear pathway:

Set up a meeting between community leadership, the Economic Development Manager (if possible), and/or with the Lands Department to discuss protocols and necessary steps.



# Readiness Reflection Exercise

Within imposed governance systems, Indigenous leadership may inherit colonial structures and processes that result in outcomes in opposition to the community's stated priorities and shared values.

Consider the following:



- *Are there any examples of successful entrepreneurial endeavours in the community - if no, what barriers might leadership consider eliminating?*



- *Does the community have priorities and values that support community members to be able to lead thriving businesses?*



- *Has the groundwork been done to ensure that it is administratively possible for a community member to start and run a business?*

### Question 3: What approvals may be required?

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Depending on the project, the following may be required:

- Land use agreements (e.g. leases);
- Archaeological and environmental assessments, such as a geotechnical assessment;
- Building permits;
- Servicing (water, power, gas);
- Water licenses;
- Infrastructure (fencing); and/or
- Insurance.

**Note: Approvals may be complicated for communities where Reserve Lands intersect or overlap with crown or private lands, requiring alignment with policies and regulations from multiple layers of government.**

Some Indigenous communities may have partnerships with existing local governments to support some of these administrative tasks, while others will need to ensure that they have the internal resources to move the project through the necessary steps.

It is often the case that community members who are venturing into food initiatives may not have much previous business experience and will require some support to make sure that they have the approvals needed. The community may want to develop a fact sheet or worksheet available for new ventures regarding approvals.



## Question 4: What challenges might the food initiative face?

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Despite the diversity of project types, geographical contexts, and vulnerabilities, common challenges have emerged in food system projects:

- **Labour:** Attracting and retaining labour (both paid or volunteers) and finding accommodation for those who need to live on-site.
- **Funding:** Availability of grants, and the need for spending and reporting by specific deadlines.
- **Loss of Traditional Knowledge:** There may not be an opportunity to connect with Elders or other leaders regarding local food system knowledge due to a loss of inter-generational learning.
- **Remote & Rural Location:** Challenges with getting food products shipped outside of the community for sales and also challenges with bringing expertise and/or tools and equipment into the community.
- **Climate change and other disasters:** Impacts of extreme heat, drought, and/or floods on food projects can have lasting impacts. Disasters that affect transportation routes and the supply chain (like wildfires, or COVID-19) also affect food businesses.

These examples provide insight into how community leaders best can support food projects.

They *do not mean* that a community should not support the project.

There should simply be awareness of what the barriers to success may look like.



## Question 5: Can we minimize or manage any risks?

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Some types of risks can be easier to control than others. The list below provides some examples of two key elements of a food initiative plan that can affect risk tolerance: business type and business leader.

**Risk 1: Business Type:** there are several types of business types - each will have its own set of pros and cons. Examples include:

- **Sole proprietor:** the project manager is the only owner and is responsible for all decisions and operations and all revenues and debts.
- **Society:** these non-profit organizations are established with a Constitution, Bylaws, and a Board of Directors. Staff run business activities and all revenues are re-distributed into the initiative.
- **Corporation:** a Board of Directors is established and the business is legally separated from the owner(s). Community leadership may have a “seat at the table” by requesting that a certain number of board positions be set aside. Revenues/ profits are distributed based on the number of shares that each owner holds. The corporation could be labeled a “benefit corporation” if benefits extend to the community.
- **Partnership:** in this type of business, all responsibilities and profits (or debts) are shared based on a partnership agreement. Decision-making is also shared based on the details held within the agreement.
- **Co-operative:** this membership-based business model allows for all profits (or debts) to be shared amongst members. It could be developed as a non-profit.

Other considerations include:

- Will the community retain a majority ownership? If the food project is established as a society, corporation or a partnership, it could be community - (e.g. Band, Nation) owned for decision-making control, with a minority owner-operator responsible for operations.

- Will there be member participation pathways built into the business structure (e.g. allowing members to contribute toward ownership or joint venture participation)?
- Does the business model include expectations related to cultural safety, land stewardship practices, and respectful working relationships with community members?

**Risk 2: Business Leadership:** The business owner/ CEO, and/or team at the helm of the food project will have significant influence as to whether or not it will succeed. Consider the following:

- ✓ Does the leader have previous business experience?
- ✓ Has the leader experienced previous business success (or if not, have they taken away key lessons from past experiences)?
- ✓ Does the leader have the resources and tools needed to make the initiative work? If not, have they clearly outlined what type, and amount, of support will be required?
- ✓ Is there a solid business plan (or project plan) that has been presented? Does the plan outline key risks and solutions to help minimize those risks?

## RISK REFLECTION EXERCISE

- Will this business leader or entrepreneur have the necessary support and decision-making authority to ensure the project progresses?
- In a community-led enterprise or co-ownership model, will decisions be made by an individual or by a committee?
- If a committee is leading the decision-making, do any of the committee members have relevant business leadership experience?
- How will project continuity be ensured through elections and leadership changes?
- Are there policies or processes that can be put in place to set the business up for success in advance?



## OUTCOMES OF SUCCESSFUL FOOD INITIATIVES

Surveys from communities undertaking food system projects found that:

- The projects positively impact the health and wellbeing of participating community members.
- There is better access to nutritious, affordable foods and more awareness of how chronic diseases can be avoided and treated by eating healthy food.
- There is a better ability to widely distribute fresh and preserved foods to community members through luncheons, feasts and food baskets.
- There are social and therapeutic benefits with access to safe spaces to gather, including the cultivation and reclamation of Traditional foods.

### Examples include:

- [Ntamtqen Community Garden & Food Hub – Lower Similkameen Indian Band](#)
- [Hupacasath Community Farm – Hupacasath First Nation](#)
- [Swiya Farm – Sechelt Nation](#)



### References:

- Northern Health- [Indigenous Food System Benefits - Stories.](#)
- BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food: [videos of success stories.](#)
- First Nations Health Authority - [Food System Program Highlights.](#)
- I-SPARC [Report on Food System Projects.](#)

## 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.

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