

Understanding Equity Diversity And Inclusion Practices Of BIAs Towards Promotion And Protection Of Cultural Food Assets

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Disclaimer:

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Land Acknowledgement:

The research work and findings presented in this report took place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. I am grateful to be part of these lands and to live here. When I was introduced to the land acknowledgment and the theory behind the long-term partnerships that eroded the trust of Indigenous peoples, I was deeply affected by the injustice done to these communities.

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Context:

Food is an integral part of one's life that shapes identity and offers a connection to cultural heritage in any setting. Cultural food is essential for the physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being of individuals (Soma et al., 2022). The lack of availability of cultural food assets can lead to a sense of social isolation, which can trigger systemic inequity, including food and livelihood insecurity (Wright et al., 2021; Dutta et al., 2013). Recently, Vancouver, known for its multicultural identity, has been facing concerns about the loss of cultural food assets (CFAs) largely due to developmental pressures. Acknowledging the situation, the City of Vancouver took a proactive approach by passing the [Place keeping motion](#) in 2022 that recognized the importance of protecting and promoting CFAs as part of intangible cultural heritage. Regarding the actual implementation of the motion, it is crucial to apply an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) lens and derive the ground reality on the impact that is being achieved towards the CFAs.

Defining a cultural food asset is often difficult and not always clear, as it can be challenging to cover all the inputs and contexts from diverse communities (Soma et al., 2021). To be inclusive and expand the scope of the project, cultural food assets were considered as businesses that are largely operated by and serve equity-denied groups, with an emphasis on ethnocultural groups focused on food-specific initiatives. Many cultural food businesses fall directly under the purview of Business Improvement Associations (BIAs). The research is looking into different avenues that the City already is using to engage and support cultural food businesses. BIAs, are one of those frontline on-ground experts and key implementation partners of the City. Similarly, they can act as a bridge between cultural food businesses and the City, offer key learnings, and could participate as part of the process to support these businesses down the line.

BIAs are non-profit organisations governed by the Board of Directors and operate through a tax levy provided by the businesses they represent. Currently in Vancouver, there are 22 BIAs that operate autonomously and engage in various activities including promotion, marketing, enhancing public spaces and street beautification to maintain vibrancy and improve customer foot traffic (City of Vancouver, n.d.).

Stemming from Vancouver's Equity Framework, the EDI lens applied to this research is defined as a subjective perspective that fundamentally considers BIAs' approaches to ensuring fair access to resources and opportunities. This involves customizing support for cultural businesses, recognizing and valuing their differences, and implementing initiatives that create an environment where all diverse cultural business owners can fully participate.

This research project aims to explore how EDI practices are integrated into the work of three BIAs (Victoria Drive, Strathcona and Collingwood) towards the promotion and

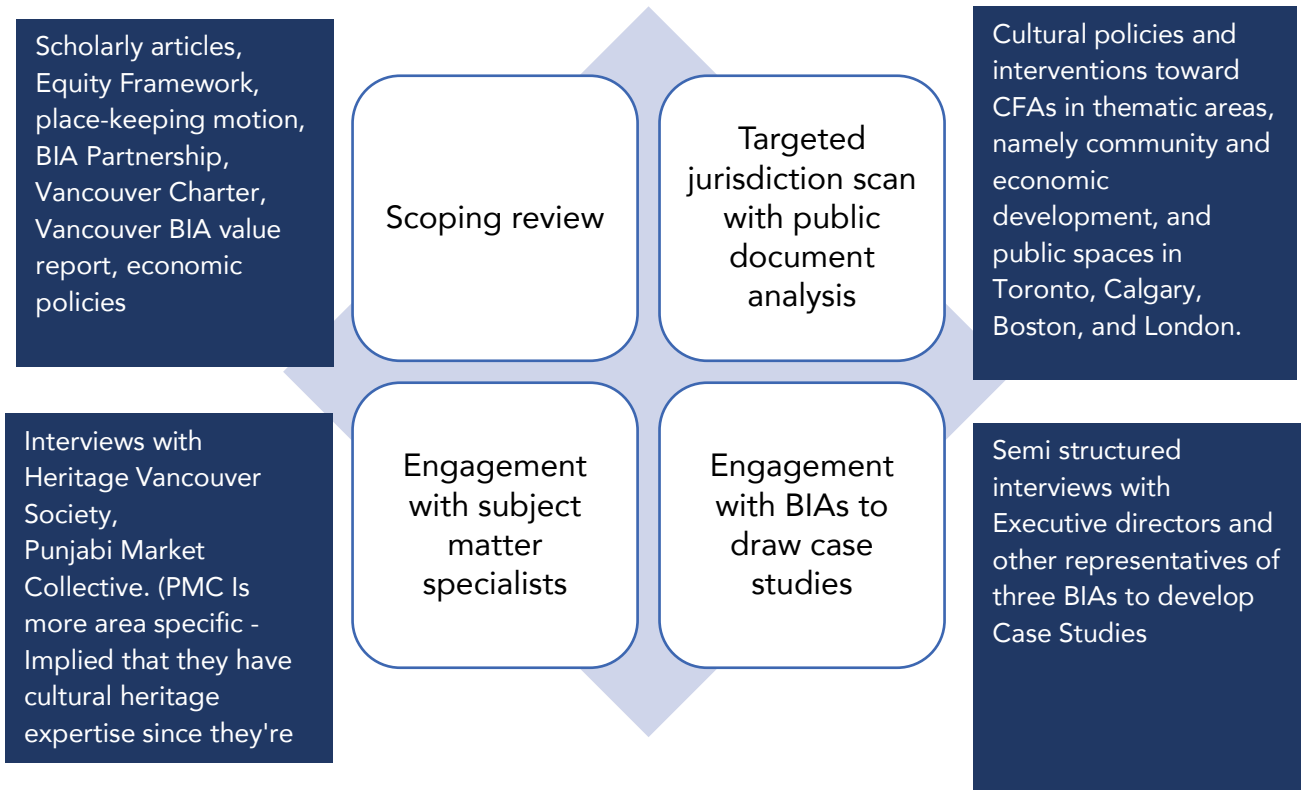
protection of cultural food businesses to inform broader cultural food asset work to be led by the City of Vancouver.

Objectives

1. Understand the current BIA focus areas and priorities, highlighting efforts made to protect and promote cultural food businesses.
2. Identify the best practices, overall initiatives, solutions, and strategies adopted by the fellow municipalities and BIAs in Vancouver that reflect the EDI perspective.
3. Offer practical and actionable insights, including recommendations, to the City of Vancouver to inform their broader work with engaging and supporting cultural food businesses, thereby enhancing cultural diversity and economic vitality.

Methodology

This project uses multiple qualitative research methodologies to address the research question. It begins with a minor scoping review to provide context on CFAs and BIAs. The research then delves into detailed public document analysis for the jurisdictional scan, which allowed for drawing lessons from fellow municipalities' policies and interventions that can complement Vancouver's existing equity, cultural, and economic policies. Engaging with Subject Matter Experts was deemed necessary to define the project's scope, given the lack of evaluation reports on cultural food businesses and EDI practices. The insights gained were used to develop a detailed consultation script for the BIAs.



Out of the 22 BIAs in Vancouver, three were purposefully selected to understand their EDI practices based on recommendations from City staff, considering their demographics and approaches to EDI. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method to collect data from subject matter experts and BIA representatives to gain deeper insights into EDI. This approach was combined with a well-drafted consultation script using qualitative literacy tools. The interviews were designed to be flexible, allowing the exploration of emerging themes and enabling participants to share their experiences and perspectives.

To consolidate all the findings from the three BIAs, a case study approach was used. According to the World Bank, a case study is a method used to gain a comprehensive understanding of a complex instance through extensive description and analysis within its specific context. This approach was chosen for its strength in uncovering complexities, understanding contextual influences, and evaluating outcomes within targeted communities. It allows for an in-depth exploration of specific practices by examining the detailed data findings from semi-structured interviews and observations.

There were certain limitations, as the identified policies from municipalities may not always explicitly indicate whether they are being implemented through BIAs or BIA-like organizations. Furthermore, since a purposive sampling approach was used, the findings are not intended to be generalizable to other BIAs but rather to inform best practices for the City to explore further.

Summary of Findings:

The jurisdictional scan of four cities revealed an increasing emphasis on promoting and protecting cultural food businesses, particularly those operated by marginalized communities. Many cities are actively supporting cultural integration through special initiatives that focus on cultural planning, community engagement, and the creation of inclusive public spaces. Several programs are specifically designed to ensure that streets reflect cultural diversity, encourage participation from equity-denied business owners, and designate special boundaries to safeguard cultural food businesses. Additionally, special incentives such as certifications, affordable spaces, and grants are being offered to actively promote cultural food businesses.

Engagement with subject matter specialists has highlighted that cultural businesses are vital for preserving cultural practices, supporting community identity, and fostering cultural integration within immigrant communities. These businesses also serve as hubs for cultural exchange, providing information, services, and connections that help immigrants feel represented. Current challenges include rising space affordability due to increasing development, a lack of succession planning, and business owners still

growing their business skills. Specialists emphasized the need for targeted policies to protect cultural businesses, such as designating historically significant spaces and incorporating cultural values into policymaking.

The adoption of EDI practices by the three BIAs is influenced by various factors. One BIA believes that a Healthy Community leads to a Healthy Economy, another operates with a philosophy of offering a “taste of everything,” and the third BIA’s mission is to foster a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community. Despite facing both specific and systemic challenges, all three BIAs have successfully implemented practices that support the long-term success of cultural food businesses. Each BIA is exploring strategic, food-centric initiatives such as commissary kitchens, food halls and food stalls in BIA events, to help these businesses address challenges related to affordability. Acknowledging language limitations, each BIA is adopting different methods, such as appointing multilingual messengers, using interpersonal skills, or collaborating with the City to develop customized resources. This multifaceted approach highlights the BIAs' commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, essential for meeting the diverse needs of cultural food enterprises. Continued assessment and refinement of these strategies will be crucial to sustaining their positive impact.

Recommendations:

The following are some of the core recommendations emerged from the research project that can be considered to strengthen the EDI lens towards the cultural food businesses through BIAs

- **Collaboration of BIAs:** The expertise of the BIAs and their community connections can be leveraged through effective collaboration of BIAs facilitated under the guidance of the City to develop action plans.
- **Sustainable Food-Centric Initiatives:** Learning from the BIAs’ initiatives, the food centric projects can be actively streamlined across the city to promote cultural food businesses.
- **Enhance BIAs' role through EDI:** Align BIAs’ mandates with Vancouver's Equity Framework and maintain disaggregated data on cultural food businesses to ensure effective EDI support and informed decision-making.
- **Customized Support:** Recognizing the importance of cultural food businesses in neighborhoods, tailored interventions can be explored to reflect the varying levels of interest and perceived value in defining these businesses as a distinct typology. Coupled with community input, these interventions can help address the specific challenges faced by cultural food businesses while also providing broader support for food businesses and newcomer entrepreneurs.

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