

BEYOND THE BUSINESS PLAN

Building Food Hubs for
Resilient Local Food
Systems

FROM IDEA TO DAY-TO- DAY OPERATIONS

A hands-on guide to planning, implementing,
evaluating, and sustaining food hubs.



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USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed for organizations that are, or wish to become, a food hub as defined below. In other words, those who aim to contribute to a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable local food system. It is not intended as a step-by-step, linear planning guide. Instead, the guide offers practical insights for planning, implementing, evaluating and sustaining a food hub in a way that is grounded in place and responsive to the needs of local food systems. While many existing guides focus on the business case or operations for food hubs, this guide offers tangible, contextual support that addresses the unique tensions food hubs face, particularly balancing financial sustainability with social and environmental objectives.



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What is a Food Hub?

Food hubs are increasingly being implemented by communities seeking to create more sustainable, resilient food systems. There are many definitions that describe food hubs and the roles they play. The purpose and model of any single food hub is highly contextual.

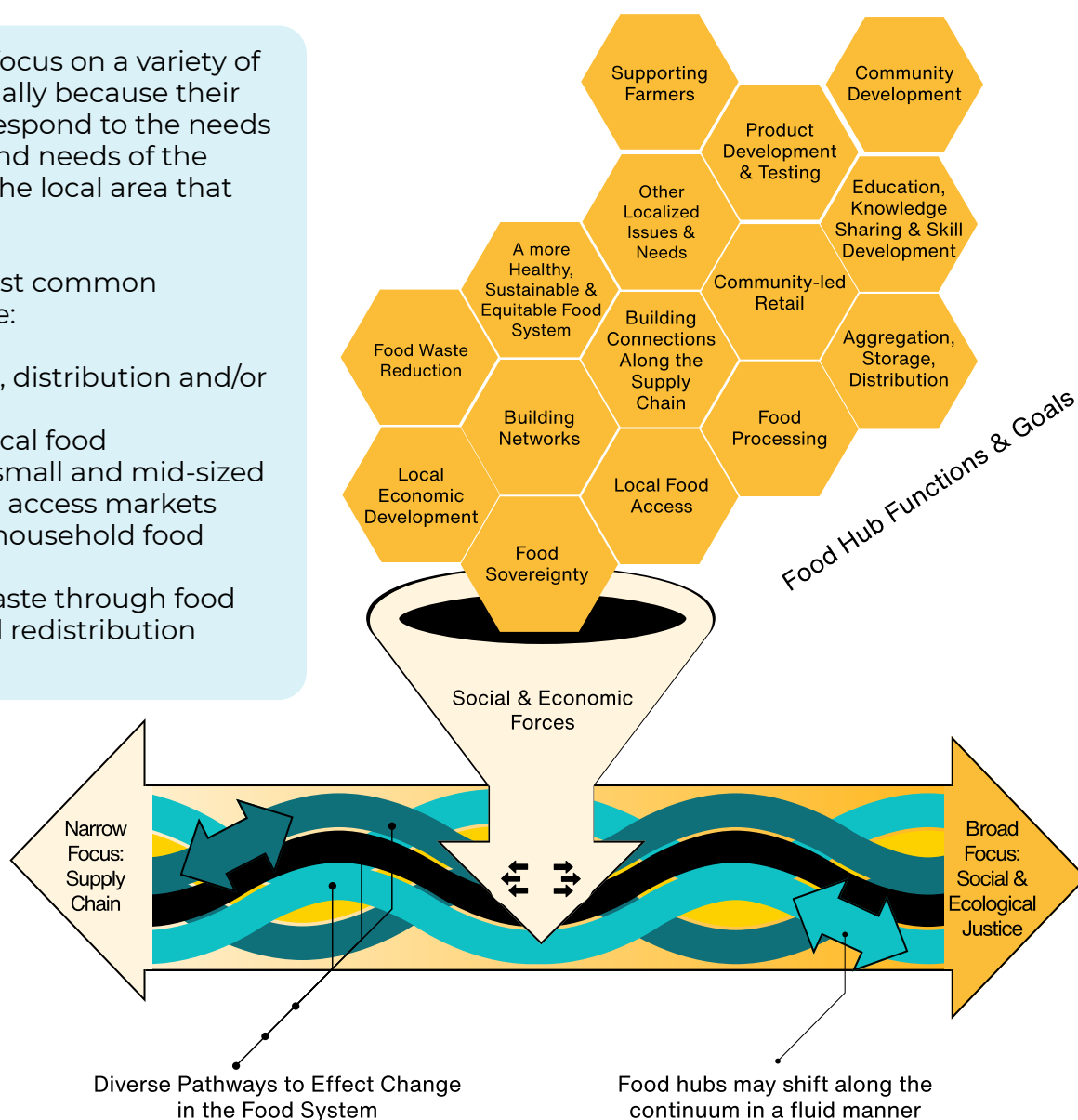
For this guide, we focus on this definition for a food hub:

A food hub is a place-based organization that aims to contribute to a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable local food system by strengthening connections among local and regional food producers, eaters, and communities.

Food hubs can focus on a variety of activities, especially because their main role is to respond to the needs of the context and needs of the food system in the local area that they serve.

Some of the most common activities include:

- Aggregation, distribution and/or processing
- Marketing local food
- Supporting small and mid-sized producers to access markets
- Supporting household food security
- Reducing waste through food recovery and redistribution initiatives



HOW WE BUILT THIS GUIDE

Research and Insights

This guide was created as an output of the Resilience and Alternative Food Networks project Exploring the Roles of BC's Food Hubs. Our research team collected data through participation in BC Food Hub Community of Practice meetings, interviews with food hub staff, users, and other key informants, attendance at related events, and literature reviews. By bringing together our findings with existing resources we have worked to create this guide.

A Summary Report provides more information about the context of food hubs in British Columbia, including the BC Food Hub Network, the BC Food Hub Community of Practice.

This guide builds on lessons learned from years of food hub research and practice in British Columbia. Below are key lessons that capture what we've learned along the way, which form a foundation for what we present here. **For real life examples of these key lessons see the case studies starting on page 51.**

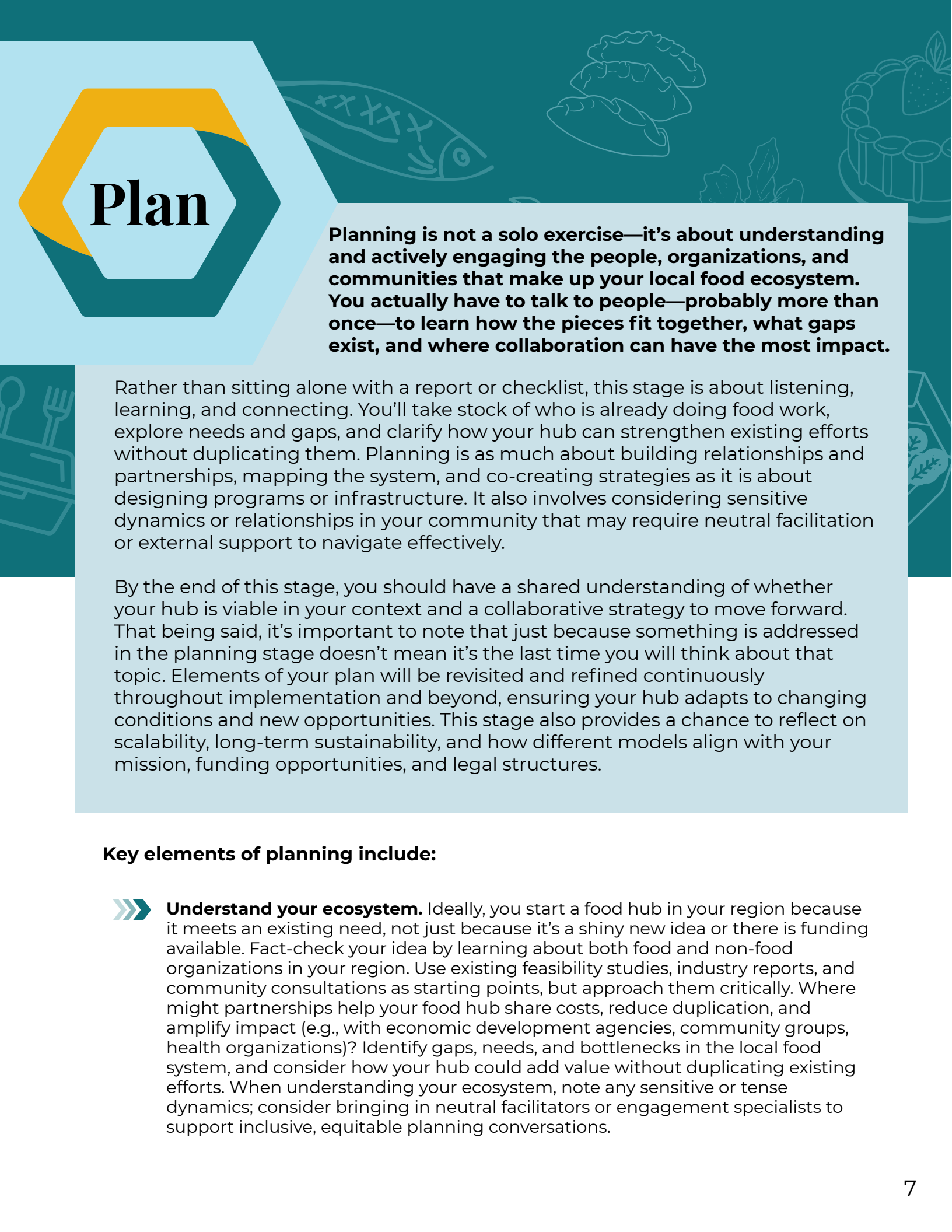
- » **Build from Community, Not from Scratch.** Build on existing efforts, connect people who are already active, and focus on meeting the biggest gaps. Acting as a connector and nurturing relationships is more important than creating flashy infrastructure. Keep your definition of a food hub focused on your community's needs and assets, without being so narrow it limits possibilities.
- » **Think regionally and strategically.** Consider your hub's place in the bigger picture. Understanding what's happening in neighbouring regions can help you identify a niche or specialization that adds value, avoids duplication, and strengthens regional food system connections.
- » **Strengthen local food systems.** Ensure food is grown, transformed, and sold within the region, by prioritizing supporting value-added production such as small-scale butchery, seasonal preserves, or processing tailored to local produce (including the option of the hub offering value-added processing as a service for producers that aren't able to do it themselves). Support regional distribution and logistics by collaborating with nearby distributors, storage providers, and logistics companies that already operate in the region.
- » **Build the Case for Investment.** Strengthen your hub's long-term stability by showing how it contributes to community priorities—food security, local jobs, and resilience. Early relationships with local government and partners set the stage for ongoing support and investment.
- » **Balance financial viability and operational stability.** Financial viability means having reliable, diverse revenue streams; operational stability means having the people, systems, and structures to manage the work effectively. Sustainable hubs intentionally build both.
- » **It's okay to slow down and change course.** Timelines, funding requirements, and bureaucratic pressures can be negotiated or adjusted. Don't feel forced to follow systems that don't work for you - take the time needed to build a thoughtful, sustainable hub.

OVERVIEW

Developing and operating a Food Hub is not a linear process, so we don't intend for this guide to be used in a linear way! Just because a topic is highlighted in one section doesn't mean you shouldn't consider this topic during the other stages. Along your journey there will be issues or opportunities where it's necessary to revisit earlier activities and decisions.

This guide is structured as follows:





Plan

Planning is not a solo exercise—it's about understanding and actively engaging the people, organizations, and communities that make up your local food ecosystem. You actually have to talk to people—probably more than once—to learn how the pieces fit together, what gaps exist, and where collaboration can have the most impact.

Rather than sitting alone with a report or checklist, this stage is about listening, learning, and connecting. You'll take stock of who is already doing food work, explore needs and gaps, and clarify how your hub can strengthen existing efforts without duplicating them. Planning is as much about building relationships and partnerships, mapping the system, and co-creating strategies as it is about designing programs or infrastructure. It also involves considering sensitive dynamics or relationships in your community that may require neutral facilitation or external support to navigate effectively.

By the end of this stage, you should have a shared understanding of whether your hub is viable in your context and a collaborative strategy to move forward. That being said, it's important to note that just because something is addressed in the planning stage doesn't mean it's the last time you will think about that topic. Elements of your plan will be revisited and refined continuously throughout implementation and beyond, ensuring your hub adapts to changing conditions and new opportunities. This stage also provides a chance to reflect on scalability, long-term sustainability, and how different models align with your mission, funding opportunities, and legal structures.

Key elements of planning include:

- » **Understand your ecosystem.** Ideally, you start a food hub in your region because it meets an existing need, not just because it's a shiny new idea or there is funding available. Fact-check your idea by learning about both food and non-food organizations in your region. Use existing feasibility studies, industry reports, and community consultations as starting points, but approach them critically. Where might partnerships help your food hub share costs, reduce duplication, and amplify impact (e.g., with economic development agencies, community groups, health organizations)? Identify gaps, needs, and bottlenecks in the local food system, and consider how your hub could add value without duplicating existing efforts. When understanding your ecosystem, note any sensitive or tense dynamics; consider bringing in neutral facilitators or engagement specialists to support inclusive, equitable planning conversations.

● Plan

KEY ELEMENTS OF PLANNING

»» **Map networks and assets.*** Document who's involved in your regional food system and what infrastructure or resources already exist. Understanding these relationships and assets helps identify gaps, partnership opportunities, and ways to share or repurpose resources—strengthening connections and aligning operations with real regional needs. This mapping doesn't need to be fancy — it could be as simple as a list of people, a spreadsheet, or a whiteboard sketch. It can also be helpful to note where strong links already exist, where there are gaps, and which partnerships, collaborations, or pilot projects could strengthen your hub, reduce costs, or open new opportunities.

**See resource list for an example of asset mapping.*

»» **Clarify your role.** Once you understand the landscape, determine where your hub fits. This might be as a connector, service provider, aggregator, processor, distributor, or some combination. Ground your role in local realities and community needs, not in a one-size-fits-all model. Consider which functions are most important for your hub and how these choices will impact long-term sustainability and relationships with producers and eaters.

»» **Plan for sustainability from the beginning.** Think about both **operational stability**** (how your hub will run day-to-day, manage resources, and adapt to challenges) and **financial viability**** (ensuring you have sufficient, reliable resources to support your vision over time). Cultivate relationships with partners who understand the importance of investing in the local food system, including municipal and regional governments, Indigenous organizations, farmers' associations, tourism boards, credit unions, community foundations, chambers of commerce, and health or social service agencies.

***Concepts of operational stability and financial viability are more fully defined and explored in the Sustain section (page 43), and the Glossary/Index (terms defined on page 65).*

● Plan

ROOTED IN VALUES

Food hubs operate not just as businesses, but as part of a broader food system, community, and ecosystem. Integrating social, environmental, and equity goals into every aspect of the hub helps strengthen the resilience of the local food system while supporting underserved communities. Your vision helps set out your values.

This includes:

- » **Deepening connections** – Foster relationships between people, communities, and the land. Recognize that food hubs are embedded in a web of ecological, cultural, and social systems. As late urban planner and Canadian food advocate Wayne Roberts emphasized, food is a powerful lever—it connects us to land, community, and culture, and allows hubs to create transformative impacts at multiple scales.
- » **Equity-centered engagement** – Intentionally engage those most impacted by current food system inequities and structural harm.
- » **Reflective practice** – Balance action with observation and reflection to understand root causes of systemic challenges before responding.
- » **Paradigm shifts** – Move from scarcity and supremacy to abundance, collaboration, and regenerative practices. Recognize food as a lever to influence local economics, disaster resilience, and food sovereignty.
- » **Community resilience** – Support local food security, sustainable agriculture, and diversified local economies as an alternative to brittle, global supply chains.



Plan

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS & CULTURAL AWARENESS

Building a successful food hub goes beyond infrastructure and services—it also requires cultivating respectful, inclusive relationships and understanding the cultural context of the communities you serve. Food hubs have a unique opportunity to engage people who are currently underserved by the commercialized food system and may benefit most from alternative models.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS & PRACTICAL STEPS

- »» **Engage Indigenous communities.** Learn about local Indigenous food systems, sovereignty, and cultural practices. Understand how food is valued, harvested, and shared, and explore ways your hub can support Indigenous-led initiatives while respecting self-determination and traditional knowledge. Start by reading, watching, and learning from available resources to build understanding. Because relationships are highly valued, a thoughtful approach is often to be introduced through someone who has worked with or knows the community.
- »» **Consider other communities.** Understand the needs, preferences, and barriers faced by immigrant, newcomer, and other culturally distinct populations in your region.
- »» **Ensure inclusive participation.** Make sure “all the people around the table” are represented in planning and decision-making. Use advisory committees, planning groups, or engagement sessions to bring diverse voices into shaping the hub.
- »» **Embed equity and cultural awareness into operations.** Provide culturally appropriate programming, training, and services wherever possible, and continually reflect on your hub’s role in promoting equity, inclusion, and food sovereignty.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES DRAWN FROM INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VISIONS

- »» Food is recognized as a sacred gift that cannot be commodified.
- »» Food is produced sustainably and in balance with the natural world.
- »» Traditional practices and cultural harvesting strategies are respected and actively maintained.
- »» Access to traditional lands and culturally adapted foods is guaranteed.
- »» Policies and governance support the integrity and health of food systems for future generations.
- »» Non-Indigenous members educate themselves about colonization, minimize impacts on unceded lands, and seek complementarity with Indigenous-led decolonization efforts.

Plan

PARTNERSHIPS

»» **No hub can do it all.** Building strong partnerships with organizations already active in your region is critical for recruiting, supporting, and sustaining entrepreneurs.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS FOR FOOD HUBS



PARTNERSHIPS

FORMS AND LEVELS OF PARTNERSHIPS

Food hub partnerships can take many forms. Some are lighter-touch and focused on building community, while others involve deep collaboration on long-term initiatives. Importantly, deeper collaboration is not automatically better. Deep partnerships take time, intention, and energy to build and maintain, so the goal is not always to have the most intensive type of partnership. Instead, the aim is to find the level of collaboration that is well matched to the relationship, capacity, and shared purpose. What matters most is that the collaboration is clear, intentional, and helps advance both the vision of the food hub and the goals of the individual partners.

Community Building	• Sharing information and staying connected to understand each other's work. • Building personal connections and creating a sense of belonging. • Attending events together to strengthen relationships. • Supporting each other through burnout prevention, mutual aid, and social support. • Building trust as the foundation for all other forms of collaboration.
Programming	• Joining committees, advisory groups, or working groups with a specific role. • Collaborating on marketing, outreach, and engagement efforts. • Co-organizing training, professional development, and community events. • Raising funds together for a specific initiative or shared priority. • Partnering to deliver projects — from short-term pilots to long-term initiatives that embed collaboration into everyday work.
Sharing Resources	• Exchanging knowledge, lessons learned, and expertise. • Sharing human resources, such as seconding staff or lending skills for specific tasks. • Sharing material resources, including funding, space, or equipment.
Sector-Level Responses	• Working together to understand sector-wide gaps and avoid duplication of effort. • Engaging in advocacy to influence policies or practices that affect food systems. • Sharing evaluation frameworks and measurement tools to better understand collective impact.

● Plan

WHEN (AND HOW) TO CONSIDER A FEASIBILITY STUDY

A feasibility study can help clarify needs, opportunities, and risks—but it's not always the right first step. Before investing in one, keep in mind:

- »» **Timing matters.** A study is most useful once you have some momentum, partnerships, and a sense of local needs. Too early, and it risks answering the wrong questions.
- »» **Choose the right scope.** Some consultants focus narrowly on financial feasibility, while others take a broader systems view. Be clear whether you need to explore the “big picture” (regional needs, gaps, roles) or a specific investment (like a shared kitchen or facility).
- »» **Find the right consultant.** Many studies fall short because consultants don't fully understand the local food system. Look for someone who will listen, ground the work in your region, and build on existing assets.
- »» **Financial feasibility is important—but it is not everything.** Especially if you're considering a major investment like a building or commercial kitchen, numbers matter. But so does alignment with your community's goals.
- »» **Ask the right question.** Instead of only asking “Is a food hub feasible here?”, try reframing: “*What is the best model for a food hub in our region?*” This shift opens space for more creative, context-based solutions.
- »» **Secure funding for feasibility work.** Small grants from economic development organizations, credit unions, or community foundations can cover the research, and feasibility studies that include tangible on-the-ground work—like a pilot project—can help demonstrate value. The process is also a chance to build longer-term relationships and interest from partners, governments, and those investing in the work longer term, so choose contractors who understand your local context and can support this collaborative approach.



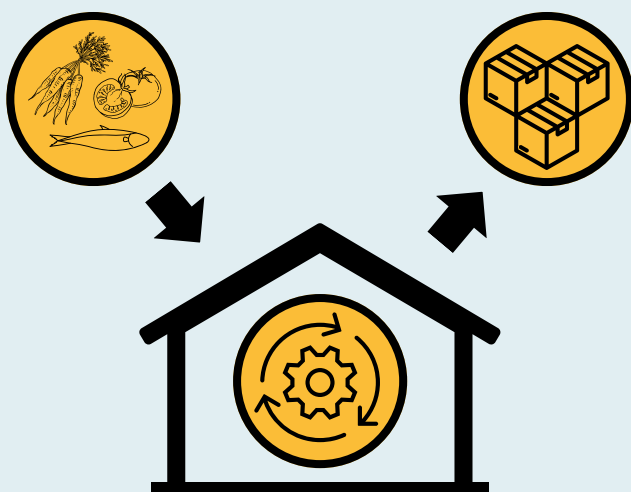
Plan

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT FOOD HUB MODELS AND APPROACHES

Types of Food Hub Models

Dispersed or Networked Model

- Operates without a central facility.
- Relies on partnerships across producers, processors, distributors, and retailers.
- Focuses on coordination, aggregation, and connection rather than infrastructure.
- Benefits: Lower capital costs, flexible, emphasizes relationships and community integration.
- Considerations: Requires strong coordination, clear roles, and reliable communication across partners. Maintaining a shared identity can be more challenging without a central space.



Single Building/Traditional Model

- A centralized facility, often including commercial kitchens, storage, or processing areas.
- Common in BC's existing food hubs.
- Benefits: Consolidates services, can facilitate on-site training and processing.
- Considerations: Higher upfront costs, requires careful planning to match local needs.

Plan

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT FOOD HUB MODELS AND APPROACHES

The legal structure or operational model you choose will shape your operations, funding eligibility, and public perception. Each has trade-offs around regulations, grant access, and flexibility.

Legal and Operational Approaches

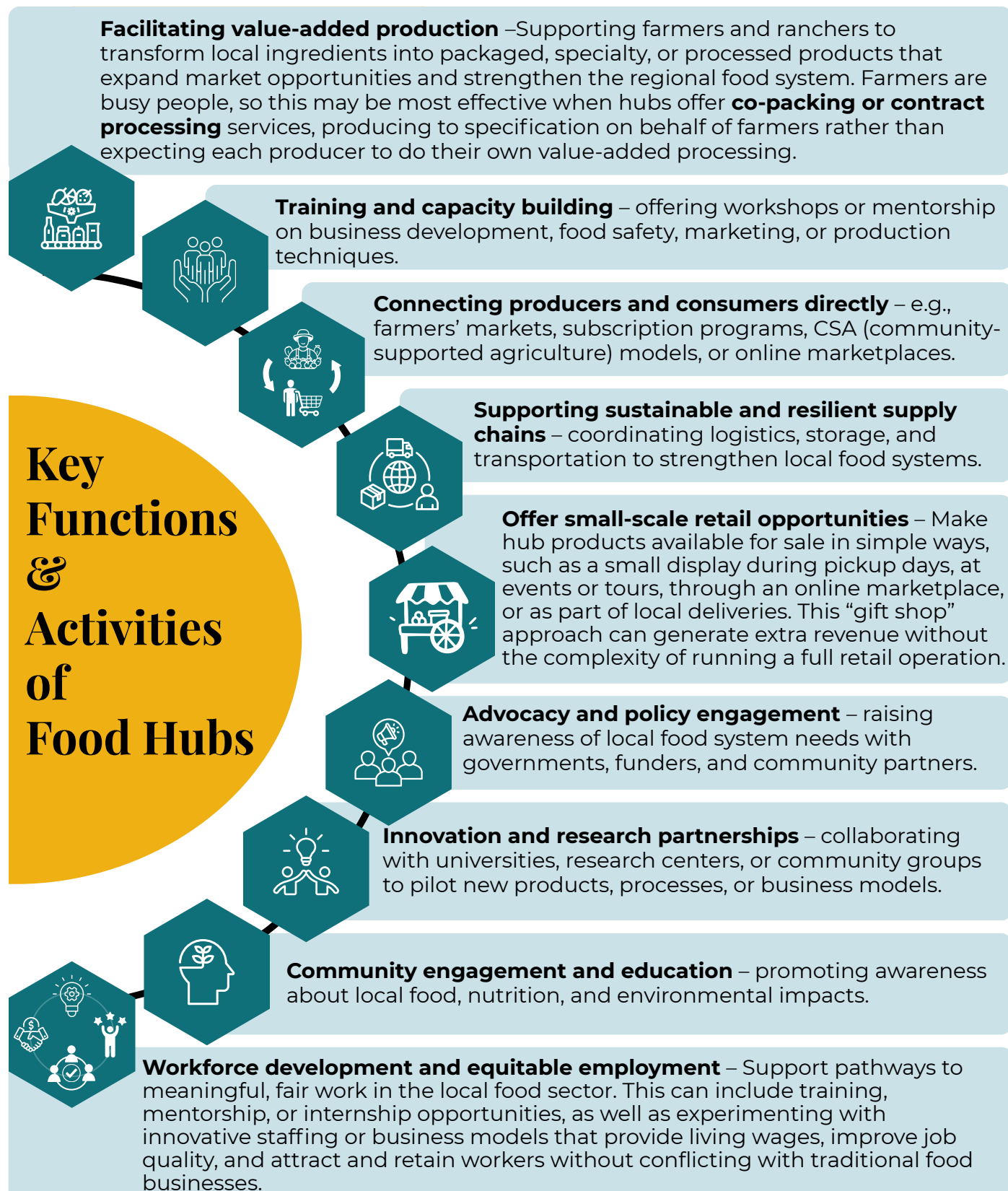
Non-Profit / Co-operative / Social Enterprise	For-Profit	Hybrid
• Focus on community benefit, equity, and local economic development. • Can access grants and government funding.	• Can generate revenue through services, leases, or product sales. • May offer more flexibility for scaling, but fewer grant options.	• Many hubs combine elements of non-profit and for-profit operations (e.g., a cooperative running fee-for-service processing). • Can balance social/environmental goals with financial sustainability.

Other concepts that are important to understand when choosing a legal or operational approach include:

Social Enterprise	Co-operative
An organization that uses business activities to advance social or environmental goals. It can be structured as a non-profit, for-profit, or hybrid, with revenue-generating activities designed to support mission-driven work rather than solely maximize profit.	An organization owned and governed by its members (e.g. producers, employees, community participants, customers, etc.). Co-ops can be non-profit or for-profit, focus on mutual benefit and shared resources, and typically return profits or benefits to members or reinvest them in the co-op.

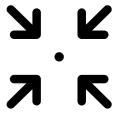
● Plan

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT FOOD HUB MODELS AND APPROACHES



● Plan

“SIZE IT RIGHT”



Be clear about your scope and structure.

Not every food hub needs to do everything. The most successful hubs focus on the work that matters most in their community rather than trying to replicate models from elsewhere. Start by defining your parameters: what capacity, infrastructure, and partnerships do you actually have? Then, build from there.

Choosing the right ownership and governance structure is closely tied to your hub's scope. A hub operated by a registered charity in a rented space can often make decisions quickly and adapt programming as needed. Hubs controlled by public bodies, such as municipal or provincial governments, may face delays in approvals that affect responsiveness. Fully independent private hubs provide maximum flexibility and control but are often harder to sustain without borrowing or private investment. Consider which structure best supports your hub's mission, scale, and ability to respond to community needs.

Talk to other communities with similar contexts, learn from what works for them, and adapt it to your local realities. A smaller, well-aligned hub with an appropriate ownership model can often have more impact than a large, overextended one. Think of your hub as a living part of the local ecosystem—creative, responsive, and grounded in what your region truly needs.



Plan

REVENUE STREAM IDEAS FOR FOOD HUBS

Food hubs can strengthen financial sustainability by diversifying revenue streams tied to their activities and expertise.

Fees for Services Offered to Farmers & Producers*	• Use of commercial kitchens or processing equipment • Processing or value-added services for farmers and ranchers • Consulting fees for supporting other food hubs or organizations in value-added production • Marketing services or product photography packages • Workshops or mentorship programs tailored for producers (business development, food safety, marketing, production techniques)
Connecting Producers, Consumers, & Supply Chain Services**	• Subscription programs, community-supported agriculture (CSA) memberships, small-scale retail or online marketplaces • Coordination of farmers' markets or pop-up retail events • Distribution, logistics, storage, or transportation services for local producers • Cold storage or warehouse rental for third-party users
Fees for Services Offered to Partners & Community Members	• Educational programs, school visits, or community workshops • Guided tours, tastings, or experiential events • Event rental space for workshops, community gatherings, or markets
Innovation, Research & Policy Partnerships	• Collaborative projects with universities, colleges, research centers, or community organizations • Pilot programs for new products, processing methods, or business models • Sponsored reports, research, or consulting for government or industry partners • Contracted policy or strategy consulting on local food systems

**Food hubs should aim to offer and be compensated fairly for services to farmers and producers. At the same time, it is important not to rely solely on revenue from these clients, or overcharge them, in order to maintain financial viability. Diversifying revenue streams, through public-facing programs, partnerships, and consulting, helps balance the hub's social mission with long-term financial stability.*

***These services can be funded in a variety of ways. Some costs may be covered by fees charged to producers or buyers for using the platform or logistics support. Local governments or regional economic development organizations may provide investment or grants to support services that strengthen the local food system. Non-profit or community partners might contribute funding if the services advance shared goals such as food security or market access. It is also possible to explore sponsorships or collaborative agreements with other organizations that benefit from these connections. Using a mix of these approaches can help ensure the hub can provide these services without relying solely on one source of funding.*

● Plan

REVENUE GENERATION FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES

While many food hubs rely on self-generated revenue, such as fees for processing, aggregation, or distribution services, social-purpose organizations often require additional funding to support their operations, expand programs, or achieve broader community impacts. Generally, the more a hub's activities resemble traditional business operations, the more revenue can be generated internally; the more the hub's work aligns with charitable or public-good initiatives, the greater the need for external support.

A balanced approach often works best: combining earned revenue with multiple sources of external funding reduces risk and allows food hubs to sustain operations, invest in long-term initiatives, and pursue mission-driven goals without being overly dependent on any single source. Regularly reviewing funding strategies and aligning them with both operational needs and community impact goals helps ensure resilience over time.



External funding can take several forms, each with distinct strengths and challenges:

Grant Funding

Funding from government agencies, foundations, or other granting bodies to support specific programs or operational costs.

- **Strengths:** Can provide significant resources for projects, enable innovation, and support mission-aligned initiatives that may not generate revenue on their own.
- **Challenges:** Often time-limited, competitive, and tied to specific reporting requirements; overreliance can create vulnerability if grants are not renewed.

Advocacy & Partnerships with Local Government

Collaborating with municipalities or regional governments to secure operational funding, in-kind support, or multi-year agreements.

- **Strengths:** Can provide stability and credibility, demonstrate public value, and embed the hub within local policy and food system priorities.
- **Challenges:** May require alignment with government priorities, slower decision-making processes, and ongoing relationship management to maintain support.

Fundraising & Community Support

Raising funds directly from community members, donors, sponsors, or through campaigns and events, including capital campaigns.

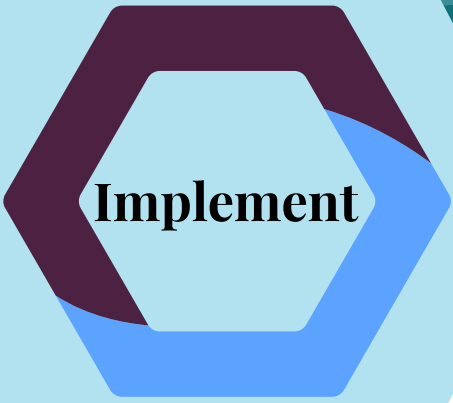
- **Strengths:** Builds community engagement and ownership, allows flexibility in how funds are used, and can create a broad support base.
- **Challenges:** Fundraising takes significant staff time and resources to do well. It can be unpredictable and may not provide reliable long-term funding. Many organizations are competing for the same sources of funds, and an overemphasis on fundraising can pull focus away from core operations.

● Plan

KEY FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

- » **Start with your vision.** It's easy to get pulled toward whatever grants are out there, but the most sustainable funding comes when you stay rooted in your mission. Take the time to pause and ask, what does success really look like for us? Then look for funding that fits. Sometimes that means getting creative about how different parts of your work connect — and sometimes it means teaming up with partners.
- » **Be selective about opportunities.** Not every grant is worth the time it takes to apply. Make sure you understand what the funder is really looking for, and don't be afraid to pick up the phone to ask questions. Building relationships with funders you go back to again and again can be just as valuable as the money itself. And before diving in, check that the effort matches the potential return, especially with highly competitive grants.
- » **Build capacity.** When you are looking at grants, try to prioritize the ones that help build your team and strengthen your organization, not just your infrastructure. Start with your budget and make sure it reflects what you actually need. Budget generously on the lines that support your people, and include administrative costs whenever possible. It can be harder to find funding that covers operations and admin, since many programs lean toward “innovative” one time or short-term projects. Some grants can spread you out instead of building you up, so focus on funding that truly adds to your capacity and advances your mission.





Implement

Now that you have clarified your vision, considered how your hub fits within the realities of your community, and explored your role in the wider ecosystem, it is time to move from planning into action. Implementation is about moving from plans into action, and building the systems that let the hub function day to day.

As we implement, the focus shifts from “Is this viable?” to “How do we keep this running and make it sustainable in practice? This includes:

- » **Solidifying community engagement and partnerships:** deepening relationships with farmers, producers, customers, Indigenous communities, local governments, and funders as active partners.
- » **Physical setup:** acquiring or adapting facilities, outfitting shared kitchens, storage, or aggregation spaces.
- » **Operations and systems:** setting up booking systems, payment tools, food safety protocols, and scheduling.
- » **Governance and staffing:** hiring, supporting, and training staff; activating your board or advisory group.
- » **Financial systems in practice:** putting bookkeeping, cash flow tracking, and invoicing into operation.
- » **Recruiting and supporting entrepreneurs:** bringing in your first clients and providing early services.
- » **Monitoring stability:** ensuring consistency in day to day operations, troubleshooting challenges, and adjusting as you grow.

In this section, we explore the key components of moving from vision to practice, and the choices and challenges that come with bringing a food hub to life.

● Implement

INTEGRATING VALUES INTO EVERYDAY OPERATIONS



Decision-making frameworks – Make choices through a values lens. Ask how a decision supports equity, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. See sample values-based decision making tool on page 45.

Integrating Values into Everyday Operations

It is not enough to define values at the planning stage; they must guide decisions, partnerships, and daily operations. Being intentional about values ensures that your work reflects your mission, supports equity, and strengthens resilience. These are some ways to integrate values.



Partnership alignment – Engage partners whose missions and approaches align with your hub's values. Collaboration works best when shared vision supports both individual and collective goals.



Program and service design – Design programming to benefit underserved communities and support local producers. For example, consider pricing structures, access to resources, and mentorship opportunities.



Resource allocation – Allocate staff time, funding, and infrastructure intentionally, ensuring that operational priorities reflect values as well as practical needs.



Balance mission and viability – Operational stability and financial viability are necessary to uphold values. A hub that struggles to exist cannot support the communities or systemic changes it aims to serve.



Reflection and adaptation – Set aside time for reflection on whether operations, partnerships, and programs are living up to stated values. Be willing to adapt approaches as needed.



Cultural and ecological awareness – Incorporate land-based knowledge, Indigenous practices, and local food traditions where appropriate, and consider the environmental impact of operational choices.



Tip: Integrating values is an ongoing process, not a one-time checklist. Establish regular practices such as team reflection sessions, value audits for decisions, and periodic reviews of partnerships to ensure alignment.

● Implement

SOLIDIFYING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Implementation is the stage where partnerships move from ideas on paper to real, everyday working relationships. Food hubs rarely operate in isolation: producers, customers, First Nations, local governments, funders, and community organizations are all part of the ecosystem that makes a hub thrive. Building these relationships into true partnerships is about moving from initial outreach to ongoing collaboration.

There are many different ways to collaborate, and you will likely work with different groups in different ways. Some partnerships may be transactional (such as customers purchasing food), while others may involve deeper integration (such as sharing space, equipment, or staff). For many food hubs, this level of everyday interaction and resource-sharing is new. It requires intention, clarity, and care.

A few things to keep in mind as you deepen these relationships:

- »» **Move at the speed of trust.** Strong partnerships can't be rushed. Take the time needed to build genuine trust before asking for or offering more.
- »» **Clarify the shared vision.** Be clear about the goals of the hub and help partners see how these connect to their own mandates and missions. Collaboration is most effective when the shared vision helps each partner advance their priorities. At the same time, it can be important not to “hide behind” your existing mandate or stop because something doesn't fit perfectly. Stretching to meet the needs of the community may require intentionally reflecting on your mission and, where appropriate, adjusting your approach. The key is finding a balance between staying true to your core purpose and being responsive to evolving community needs.
- »» **Be explicit about roles and expectations.** Misunderstandings can strain relationships. Discuss who is responsible for what, how decisions will be made, and how conflicts will be addressed.
- »» **Put agreements in writing—when helpful.** Partnership agreements or Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) can provide clarity and prevent miscommunication. Treat them as living documents, worked on collaboratively, that support the relationship rather than replace it.
- »» **Balance structure with flexibility.** Documents and systems can guide collaboration, but the heart of partnership is trust and respect. Keep processes supportive of relationship-building rather than rigid or transactional.



The more you engage partners as active co-creators, the stronger your hub will become. Over time, these relationships can expand into joint initiatives, shared funding opportunities, and a deeper sense of community ownership of the hub.

● Implement

PHYSICAL SPACE AND OPERATIONS

Selecting and managing physical space is a key operational consideration for food hubs. Options include renovating existing spaces, building new facilities, or creating hybrid models across multiple locations in partnership with other organizations. Location, transportation, and parking are important factors, especially for hubs serving rural or geographically diverse areas.

Managing a shared kitchen or production space can be complex, requiring careful planning for client use, equipment needs, safety procedures, and operational logistics. Tools such as scheduling software or backup payment systems can help streamline operations. Since this may be a very new way of working that requires specialized skills and knowledge, consider bringing in expertise from fields such as facility management, construction, kitchen design, and business operations to support successful planning and management. If possible, talk to other food hub managers or staff who are doing similar activities. Ask for a tour and get a detailed picture of how their operations work.

Some things to consider:

Ensure versatility of space to meet diverse business and community needs.



Plan for safety protocols, particularly when clients are working independently or during off-hours.



Understand technical requirements such as plumbing, electrical capacity, and fire suppression systems.



Monitor client cash flow and provide fair, flexible approaches for space usage and payments.



● Implement

SOFTWARE AND SYSTEMS

A key part of implementation is being clear about the tools your hub will use to get the work done. It helps to do a bit of homework before choosing systems, so you understand what they might look like and how they will support your daily operations. In terms of software, be selective about what you invest in. When choosing tools and systems, remember that the best tool isn't necessarily the fanciest or newest — it's the one your whole team will commit to using consistently. Some hubs find that keeping things simple by doing things "manually" or with spreadsheets or documents was the best fit for their size and capacity. Others shared that certain tools were critical to making their work possible. Supporting key operations can be worth the cost when the right system is chosen.

Here is a list of softwares that have helped food hubs in BC:

Local Food Marketplace

([Local Food Marketplace](#)) – e-commerce platform designed for food hubs, CSAs, and buying clubs; supports aggregation and distribution.

Open Food Network Canada

(<https://about.openfoodnetwork.ca/>) – open-source platform for local food sales and community food distribution models.

Local Line (<https://site.localline.ca/>) – Canadian-built sales and distribution platform for farmers, hubs, and aggregators; supports online stores, subscriptions, and delivery management.

The Food Corridor

(<https://www.thefoodcorridor.com/>) – scheduling, booking, and billing software designed for shared-use kitchens and food hubs.

Airtable (<https://www.airtable.com/>) – versatile database tool for managing operations, client information, inventory, and workflows (customizable for food hub needs).

Routific (<https://www.routific.com/>) helps food hubs optimize delivery routes, making distribution across wide regions faster, more efficient, and cost effective

Additional Recommended Tools:

To support different aspects of your hub's operations, consider a mix of tools in the following areas:

Communication platforms are important so your team knows where and how to connect. Be clear about which platform is used for day-to-day conversations, for formal updates, and for quick questions, especially if you use more than one.

Financial management systems help with bookkeeping, invoicing, and tracking cash flow. Having a reliable system makes it easier to keep your hub financially organized and reduces stress at reporting or tax time.

Shared file and collaboration tools allow staff and partners to work together, store important documents, and access materials from anywhere. They also provide a record of decisions and a shared space for governance documents.

Project management tools can support coordination with staff, board members, and community partners. They help keep track of tasks, deadlines, and responsibilities in a clear and accessible way.

Marketing and customer engagement tools make it easier to reach out to your community, share updates, and build loyalty among buyers and partners. Consistent communication supports both sales and community connection.

Learning communities and resource libraries provide access to peer knowledge, training materials, and case studies. Connecting with networks of food hub practitioners can reduce isolation and save time by showing what has worked elsewhere.

● Implement

HUMAN RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE

At this stage, your goal is to set a solid foundation for how the hub will operate, including **identifying what staff and volunteer roles are necessary, and clarifying governance structures**. Clear role definitions and governance structures from the start reduce confusion, improve accountability, and help set expectations for how the hub operates day-to-day.

- »» **Governance Structure:** Decide whether your hub will operate under a board structure and, if so, what type of board best suits your needs (e.g., advisory, working, or governing). Clarify roles and responsibilities for board members, staff, and volunteers, and how decisions will be made.
- »» **Staffing:** Determine what roles are essential to support operations, programming, and community engagement. Decide which positions will be employees versus contractors based on workload, expertise, and funding. Make sure there is funding secured to support these positions, even if only for the first year.
- »» **Volunteers:** Identify how volunteers will contribute to operations and programming. Decide who will recruit, onboard, and manage volunteers, and clarify their responsibilities.
- »» **Future Planning:** Recognize that staffing, volunteer management, and governance structures may need to evolve as the hub grows. Consider flexible models that can scale over time without creating confusion or bottlenecks.



● Implement

RECRUITING AND SUPPORTING POTENTIAL FOOD HUB USERS

A central role of food hubs is to attract and support users or potential clients. Users might include farmers expanding into value-added production, small food businesses or processors ready to scale up, caterers, community groups, or individuals testing a food start-up idea. Food hubs can play a key role in helping these entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of growing a business while contributing to a stronger local food system.

Many food hubs face similar challenges when it comes to working with users.



First, awareness is often an issue. Many potential users are not familiar with what a food hub offers, or they assume that costs are too high. It is important to clearly communicate the value of the hub and the support it provides. Price sensitivity is another challenge, particularly in rural settings, where user fees can feel prohibitive. Partnerships or subsidies can help reduce these barriers and make the hub more accessible.



Another common challenge is finding entrepreneurs who are at the right stage of growth. Many new entrants lack business planning experience, a clear understanding of cash flow, or knowledge of available sales opportunities. Supporting these early-stage businesses often requires patience and guidance over multiple years, especially in the first five years of operation. Finally, capacity is a key consideration for hubs. Supporting businesses at different stages of growth can be resource-intensive, and each user has different needs, which can make it challenging to provide effective guidance without spreading staff too thin.



● Implement

RECRUITING AND SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS

Strategies for Recruitment:

- » Build awareness through word-of-mouth, in-person outreach at farmers markets and fairs, open houses, and regularly scheduled information sessions.
- » Become part of the local food community by attending events and gatherings where entrepreneurs already connect, which helps build trust and credibility.
- » Experiment with marketing approaches, measure the results, and adjust strategies to find what works best for the hub and its community.

Strategies for Support:

- » **Leverage existing partnerships and supports.** Many local and regional organizations — such as Community Futures, economic development offices, chambers of commerce, and business accelerators — already offer resources like business advising, financing, and training. Rather than duplicating these efforts, build relationships and referral pathways to connect your hub's clients directly to existing supports. This strengthens the ecosystem while conserving your own capacity.
- » **Meet people where they're at.** Support growth step by step, especially during the first five years.
- » **Use group formats.** Offer workshops, peer support sessions, and resource packages to set expectations and reduce one-on-one time demands.
- » **Bring in expertise.** Host subject matter experts, business consultants, lenders, and retailers to provide targeted support and guidance.
- » **Connect to financing.** Understand the difference between developmental lenders and traditional lenders: developmental lenders are more flexible and willing to provide financing to new or early-stage businesses based on a business plan and cash flow projections, even if the business has limited operating history. Traditional lenders, such as banks, typically require at least two years of operating history, steady revenue, and proven credit before offering loans. Supporting entrepreneurs with realistic cash flow projections and guiding them through funding applications can improve their chances of securing the financing they need to grow.
- » **Leverage technology.** Consider member portals, online resource libraries, or platforms like Open Food Network to streamline services and open new markets.

Next steps food hubs have identified:

- Create easy-to-access resource packages.
- Organize peer networking or drop-in support sessions.
- Offer business planning or food safety workshops.
- Partner with retailers, distributors, and co-ops to help entrepreneurs access new markets.
- Explore subsidies, discounts, or sponsorships that lower the cost barrier for start-ups.

● Implement

IMPLEMENTATION FOR STABILITY AND GROWTH

In the planning stage, we introduced the idea that sustainability has two parts: operational stability and financial viability. During implementation, your focus is to put those ideas into practice. At this stage, the goal is to build reliable systems for day-to-day operations while beginning to shape a financial model that will support your hub over time. It is normal for the financial picture to feel shaky at first. What matters most is building a foundation that can grow steadier as the hub matures.

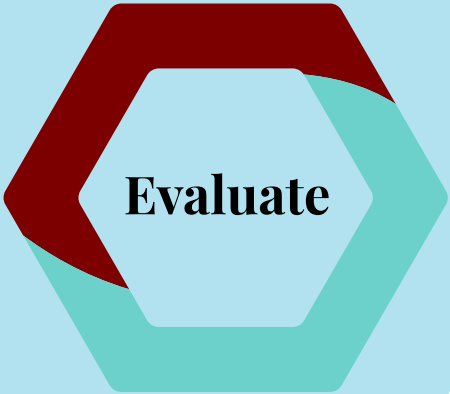
»» **Operational stability** means creating consistency in how your hub runs. Staff, clients, and partners should know what to expect when they interact with the hub. This includes clear roles and responsibilities, reliable scheduling and booking systems, food safety practices that are always followed, and straightforward invoicing and payment processes. When things do not go smoothly—and they won't always—stability also means having the capacity to troubleshoot challenges without burning out your team or losing trust with your clients.

»» **Monitoring and adjusting** are part of the process. New hubs often find that their first systems or policies are not quite the right fit. What matters is staying open to feedback, testing changes, and making steady improvements as you grow. Small course corrections early on can prevent bigger problems down the road.

»» **Financial viability** at this stage is about experimenting with and refining your revenue model, not about having everything solved. Some hubs rely more on grants in the beginning, while others lean on service fees, rentals, or contracts. The important thing is to track what works, what doesn't, and where you need to adjust to avoid over-reliance on any one source of income.

»» **Evaluation** is the thread that ties this all together. Tracking how stable your operations feel, what financial assumptions are proving true or false, and how your systems are working in practice gives you the insight you need to adapt. The next section of this guide offers tools and guidance on how to evaluate in ways that are practical and useful for your team.





Evaluate

The most valuable function of evaluation is to help you understand your work and support decision-making.

While funders may request metrics like “number of jobs created,” evaluation’s deeper value lies in creating space for reflection—individually and as a team—on what you are learning and observing. Given typical staffing and budget constraints, it can be challenging for hubs to track every metric, manage marketing, or invest in systems-building; focusing on the most essential questions ensures limited resources are used effectively.

Evaluation should emphasize ongoing reflection, dialogue, and learning rather than just data collection. Be clear about what you want to know, and notice patterns or changes over time. Even simple, regular reflection provides powerful insights that guide decisions and strengthen your hub’s direction. The self-assessment worksheet in this guide supports this process, helping teams step back and assess where the hub is gaining stability, what’s shifting, and what might need more attention.

High-quality, consistent metrics—especially when shared across food hubs—also help advocate for the local food system. Suggestions for key indicators are included on the next page.

PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATION

Understand funder priorities:

When funders request particular metrics, consider why they are asking and how the information will be used.

Less is more:

Focus on collecting data that is useful and actionable. Avoid overwhelming yourself with every possible indicator or metric.

Keep it reflective:

Make space for ongoing conversations and observations about how the work feels, what’s working, and what’s not. Reflection doesn’t have to be formal—it can happen in team meetings, debriefs, or casual check-ins.

Look beyond the numbers:

Don’t just track “how many jobs” were created. Consider the quality and stability of those jobs, who benefits, and how the hub contributes to supporting local businesses and the broader food system.

Leverage perspectives:

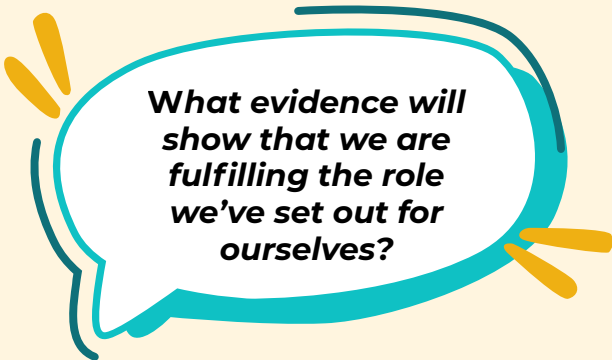
Staff, farmers, suppliers, and community members have insights into how your hub shapes livelihoods. Their experiences enrich your understanding of impact.

● Evaluate

TRACKING KEY INDICATORS

Evaluation works best when the indicators you track reflect your hub's **specific activities and priorities**, rather than trying to measure everything.

The key question to ask is:



What evidence will show that we are fulfilling the role we've set out for ourselves?

Choose indicators based on the key functions or activities your food hub carries out. Pick 1–2 indicators for each core function of your hub. For example:

- **Training and capacity building:** number of workshops offered, participants trained, or businesses launched following training.
- **Connecting producers and consumers:** volume of sales through the hub, number of CSA subscribers, farmers' market participation, or number of repeat buyers.
- **Supporting supply chains:** quantity of local food moved, number of producers using storage/logistics services, number of new partnerships with distributors or processors.
- **Financial sustainability:** diversification of revenue streams, proportion of operating costs covered by earned revenue vs. grants, increase in long-term operational support from government or other partners, reduced reliance on short-term or project-based funding.
- **Community and economic impact:** number of jobs created or sustained, number of small businesses supported, contributions to local food security or resilience, visibility and recognition of the hub as a valued contributor to the local and regional food system.
- **Policy and advocacy impact:** instances where government or community stakeholders reference hub recommendations, integration of hub priorities into local plans or policies, or successful partnerships that influence broader food system practices.

Combine quantitative and qualitative measures: Use numbers where they make sense (jobs created, revenue generated) but complement them with stories, testimonials, or case studies that show impact.

- *Example: qualitative insight from a farmer about how the hub enabled them to reach new markets.*

Focus on indicators that inform decisions: Prioritize data that helps you adjust programs, improve services, or demonstrate value to funders and partners.

- *Example: tracking customer satisfaction with hub services or training outcomes to identify areas for improvement.*

● Evaluate



ENSURING DATA QUALITY

It's easy to get lost in the details or feel overwhelmed if you're not a data or research expert. Good evaluation doesn't require complex tools or advanced statistical knowledge—it starts with **clarity about what you want to know**.

Practical tips for tracking credible data:

- »» **Define your questions first:** Be clear about what you want to understand or learn from your evaluation. What decisions do you want the data to inform?
- »» **Keep it simple:** Like with the tools section above, the best tool is the one you use. You can track information via specialized software or in a straightforward spreadsheet format. Even basic tables with consistent categories, dates, and notes can provide valuable insights.
- »» **Seek guidance when needed:** Don't hesitate to look for advice online or reach out to research or evaluation professionals. Simple guidance on measurement, tracking, and reporting can help ensure your data is credible and useful. Hiring a program evaluation professional could be helpful to help you clarify your goals, how to assess whether you are reaching your goals, or how to collect and summarize information.
- »» **Focus on usefulness, not perfection:** High-quality evaluation comes from consistent, relevant information that helps your hub reflect, learn, and improve—not from collecting every possible metric or achieving perfect precision.



● Evaluate

COMMUNICATING FINDINGS

Collecting data is only part of the evaluation process. To make your work visible and actionable, it's important to share insights with the right audiences in meaningful ways. **Remember that findings can come from both formal metrics and ongoing reflection—observations, staff experiences, and informal feedback are all valuable.**

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Tailor how you share results depending on who will see them.

- **Internal team:** Use findings to reflect, identify priorities, and adjust strategies.
- **Funders/ investors or partners:** Highlight key achievements, outcomes, and learnings, including both numbers and stories.
- **Community members:** Share accessible summaries or stories that show how the hub is contributing to local food systems and livelihoods.



USE MULTIPLE FORMATS

- Simple spreadsheets or dashboards for internal tracking.
- Short reports or infographics to communicate progress to external audiences.
- Stories, case studies, or quotes from producers, staff, or participants to illustrate impact.



FOCUS ON MEANINGFUL FINDINGS

Share insights that help decision-making, strengthen partnerships, and tell a compelling story about your hub's role in the food system. This includes lessons learned through reflection and light-touch evaluation, not just formal metrics.



REFLECT AND PLAN NEXT STEPS

Use reporting as an opportunity to highlight lessons learned and outline actions for improvement, creating a cycle of learning, adaptation, and growth.





TOOL

Evaluation Worksheet

This worksheet can be used after a food hub is operational. This worksheet should be completed every 6-12 months reflect on progress, note persisting challenges, and identify next steps. This tool can be used by food hub staff for individual reflection, but it's even more valuable when used to guide a group discussion that includes key partners, clients, and relevant evidence.

Leadership & Capacity:

Do food hub operators have the knowledge and skills required for success? Are these skills currently being used?

Check the appropriate box!



Seed

Limited knowledge.



Sprout

Basic knowledge. Application of knowledge is in early stages.



Plant

Moderate Knowledge. Application of knowledge is improving operations.



Flower

Well-developed knowledge actively applied to operations and decision-making.



Fruit

A high-level of expertise. This expertise is used to advice other operations.

Notes

Key evidence?

Progress or challenges?

Next steps?



Evaluation Worksheet

Partnerships & Networks

How well do you work with others to maximize impact and meet goals across the food system?

**Seed**

Working mostly with internal team, limited collaboration.

**Sprout**

Starting to build relationships.

**Plant**

Several active partnerships which support operations and shared goals.

**Flower**

Strong collaborative network with regular, meaningful collaboration.

**Fruit**

The hub and the network are a key driving force in regional collaboration. Collaboration grows and evolves in response to opportunity and impact.

Notes



Evaluation Worksheet

Operational Viability

Is the hub able to function effectively and sustainability from day-to-day? Do processes work smoothly to deliver on key tasks and broader objectives? Is there sufficient workforce, infrastructure, and processes in place to carry out this work?



Seed

The hub struggles to deliver key services due to capacity gaps. Operations are reactive and minimal planning occurs. Staff are just finding their footing.



Sprout

The hub delivers key services but with significant effort and problem-solving. Staff recognize the need for policies and processes but lack time to develop them.



Plant

Operations meet most goals reliably. Basic processes exist and are beginning to be formalized. Processes and policies are in place but may not be used consistently. Staff engage in some planning and strategizing.



Flower

Operations run smoothly with established policies and processes. Coordinated decision-making and proactive problem-solving are practiced. Planning is prioritized.



Fruit

Operations are efficient, resilient, and adaptable. Well-established systems enable strategic thinking and innovation. The hub consistently plans for growth.

Notes



Evaluation Worksheet

Financial Viability

How well does the hub cover current costs while planning for future growth and uncertainties?

**Seed**

Strong reliance on short-term funding.

**Sprout**

Starting to develop multiple streams of revenue. Basic financial planning.

**Plant**

Multiple income sources and improving financial systems. Some cost recovery, and core operations are partially supported by income sources.

**Flower**

Stable funding supporting core operations. Strategic financial planning.

**Fruit**

Long-term financial security and financial resilience. Diverse revenue sources.

Notes



Evaluation Worksheet

Investment & External Support

How well do external actors understand the value of the hub's work? Does the hub effectively work to build diverse and long-term investment and support?



Seed

Limited external awareness and support. Reliance on short-term funding.



Sprout

Building visibility, interest, and connections.



Plant

Recognition and support is growing across multiple sources. The hub's funding base is beginning to diversify.



Flower

The hub has stable relationships with key external partners such as local government, regional institutions, and other funders. These partners consider the hub in local and regional planning and provide some funding or in-kind support.



Fruit

The hub is meaningfully included and engaged in local or regional strategies for food systems and/or economic development. Funding is secure, long-term, and diversified.

Notes



Evaluation Worksheet

Economic Development

How well does the hub support local and regional economic development? Does the hub lead to strengthened local businesses and job creation?

**Seed**

Limited economic development or support for local business.

**Sprout**

Providing some support for several local businesses. Small-scale job creation.

**Plant**

Helping several businesses grow and access the consumer market. Growing job creation.

**Flower**

The hub is recognized as a contributor to economic development for the local or regional economy. The hub offers business support and/or infrastructure.

**Fruit**

The hub is a key driver of economic activity, supporting innovation and employment.

Notes



Evaluation Worksheet

Food System Development

Is the hub building a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system? Does the hub contribute to strengthened supply chains, increased food access, Indigenous food sovereignty, and/or stronger communities?



Seed

The hub's work is not yet connected to broader food system goals in an intentional or substantial way.



Sprout

Building connections that enable the hub to support a more sustainable and/or equitable food system.



Plant

Actively contributing to a local food supply chain and improving access to local food. Relationships and work supports food security, sustainability, and/or Indigenous food sovereignty.



Flower

The hub plays a meaningful role in building the food system. Strong collaboration with others towards food system goals.



Fruit

Leading efforts for regional food system transformation with long-term impact.

Notes



TOOL

Evaluation Worksheet

Other Notes

Date Completed: _____

Evaluator: _____



Sustain

LESSONS LEARNED & HOW TO ADDRESS ISSUES THAT ARISE

Sustainability is about more than just keeping the doors open—it's about building a food hub that can adapt, thrive, and continue creating value over the long term.

This means staying flexible, maintaining operational stability, strengthening financial viability, deepening partnerships, and continually learning and improving. The hub you've built is living and responsive, so staying attentive to the environment, community needs, and internal capacity is key to long-term success.

Understanding Sustainability in the Context of Food Hubs

When people see the word “**sustainability**,” they often think about environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic impacts. In this section, we focus more narrowly on two specific aspects of sustainability as they relate to food hubs: **operational stability** and to **financial viability**. All of these terms are defined in the glossary-index at the end of the guide.

Operational stability is about knowing how to run your hub, understanding your clients, and being able to adapt to changing circumstances. Based on our observations, a stable food hub has:

- The ability to maintain consistent operations, manage staff and resources effectively, and adapt to day-to-day challenges.
- A clear structure, known roles, and predictable processes that allow the hub to function smoothly.
- Enough operating capacity and predictability to meet the current needs of clients and your community without constant crisis management.
- Grounding in the community with reliable relationships, processes, and understanding of the hub's ecosystem.
- The ability to respond to both existing and emerging regional needs, adjusting services and programming as circumstances shift.

Financial viability is achieved when a hub has sufficient and reliable resources to support its vision without relying on sporadic funding. Characteristics of financially sustainable hubs include:

- The capacity to generate or secure enough resources to support the hub's vision and activities over the long term.
- Diversified income streams, including self-generated revenue, reliable grants, or ongoing support from government or community partners.
- A business model or funding plan that ensures day-to-day operations and essential expenses, such as staff, space, and materials, are reliably covered without constant scrambling for resources.
- The ability to invest in programs, staff, infrastructure, and strategic priorities while maintaining long-term financial health.
- An understanding that most food hubs will face some level of financial vulnerability; sustainability is about managing this vulnerability rather than eliminating it entirely.

Sustain

Understanding Sustainability in the Context of Food Hubs

It is important to recognize that financial viability does not always mean profitability in the private-sector sense. For most food hubs, financial viability means sustaining core operations while contributing to community goals, even without profit generation. Relying entirely on inconsistent grant funding for basic operations can signal that the hub's model or level of community support is not yet strong enough, and financial sustainability should be seen as a spectrum rather than a fixed state. A solid business plan should balance mission-driven goals with realistic financial planning, ensuring that basic operations are covered through a combination of earned revenue and reliable, year-over-year investment.

Food hub staff can also play a critical advocacy and partnership role by encouraging investment and recognition from local and provincial governments. When governments and other stakeholders see hubs as contributors to social good — supporting small businesses, enhancing food security, creating jobs, and strengthening local food systems — it helps link financial sustainability directly to broader community goals. This is groundwork that can and should be done in the planning phase - it will make implementation and sustaining that much easier.

We have included evaluation worksheets in this guide* to help you understand where your hub stands in terms of Operational Stability, Financial Viability and Investment and External Support.

Adaptability & Evolution

Food hubs need to evolve as markets, community needs, and funding landscapes change. Staying adaptable means being open to pivoting your model when necessary—this could include expanding delivery services as demand grows, adjusting programming, or shifting focus from processing to aggregation. Build processes to regularly scan the environment and respond to changes proactively, rather than reactively.

At the same time, it is crucial to stay grounded in your vision. Your understanding of the vision, mission, or specific goals may shift over time, and the activities you pursue may change, but the guiding purpose of the hub should remain clear. Use your values as a compass for decision-making—tools like the simple values-based decision framework shared below can help ensure that every new initiative, partnership, or funding opportunity aligns with your mission, supports equity, and contributes to a resilient local food system. This approach allows you to pivot or experiment without losing sight of the hub's core purpose.



TOOL

VALUES-BASED DECISION TOOL

Use this tool to guide decisions about new projects, initiatives, or funding opportunities. It helps ensure alignment with your hub's values, mission, and priorities, while considering feasibility, impact, and partnerships.

An individual staff member can use these prompts on their own, but the tool is most effective when completed as a team or with relevant partners. It is also useful to review all initiatives every six to twelve months to reflect on progress, make adjustments, and pivot when necessary.

1. Alignment with Values & Mission

- Does this initiative reflect our core values around equity, sustainability, and community resilience?
- Does it support local producers, underserved communities, or the local food system?
- Does it connect with our hub's vision and existing programs?

2. Fit & Collaboration

- Are we best positioned to lead this work, or would a partner be better suited?
- Does it complement current programs, partnerships, and staff expertise?
- Could it build new relationships or strengthen community networks?

3. Feasibility & Resources

- Do we have the staff capacity, skills, and time to do this well?
- Are financial and material resources realistic and sustainable?
- Could we pilot or phase the initiative to reduce risk?

4. Potential Impact

- Does it address a meaningful gap or need in the local food system?
- What impact could it have relative to the resources invested?
- Will it generate learning, growth, or new opportunities for the hub and partners?

5. Reflection & Review

- How will we track progress, challenges, and successes?
- How will reflection and evaluation be built into the initiative?
- Will it provide insights to refine the overall strategy of our food hub or organization?

Sustain

HUMAN RESOURCES & GOVERNANCE

Sustaining a hub requires ongoing attention to the people and structures that support it. By investing in your team and governance processes, you ensure stability while remaining adaptable to changing circumstances.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION:

Maintain open communication and alignment with partners, including First Nations, producers, community organizations, and funders. Periodically revisit partnership goals, shared values, and expectations to ensure they remain relevant and supportive of both short- and long-term objectives.



VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT:

Regularly evaluate volunteer roles and processes. Ensure volunteers feel valued, supported, and connected to the hub's mission. Adapt roles as needed to meet operational changes or new initiatives.



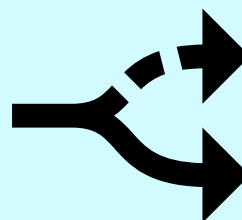
BOARD MANAGEMENT:

Periodically review board composition, engagement, and effectiveness. Ensure that board members have the skills, knowledge, and commitment to support evolving strategic goals. Consider succession planning for key positions.



COURSE CORRECTIONS:

Use reporting as an opportunity to highlight lessons learned and outline actions for improvement, creating a cycle of learning and growth.



Sustain

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Even well-established food hubs face ongoing challenges. Sustaining operations means anticipating and addressing these systematically rather than reacting on an ad hoc basis. **Key strategies include:**

- **Partnership Ecosystem Management:** Maintain open communication and alignment with partners, including First Nations, producers, community organizations, and funders. Periodically revisit partnership goals, shared values, and expectations to ensure they remain relevant and supportive of both short- and long-term objectives.
- **Managing Physical Spaces:** Whether operating from a single facility or multiple sites, regularly assess how your space meets operational needs. This includes ensuring the facility remains versatile, safe, and accessible for diverse users, and reviewing equipment, infrastructure, and maintenance requirements.
- **Financial and Operational Flexibility:** Anticipate fluctuations in revenue, client demand, or external funding. Build contingency plans, maintain reserves, and develop operational processes that allow for quick adaptation while maintaining stability.
- **Community Relevance:** Stay connected to the community and broader food system to ensure programming and services continue to meet emerging needs. This includes monitoring geographic diversity, client mix, and market trends, and being willing to adjust offerings, service models, or outreach methods.
- **Learning from Setbacks:** When challenges arise, treat them as opportunities for reflection and course correction. Document lessons learned and integrate them into operational processes, partnership agreements, and future planning.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Long-term success for a food hub comes from reinforcing foundational elements while continuously evolving. **Critical factors include:**

- **Strong, Aligned Partnerships:** Partnerships succeed when roles, responsibilities, and shared goals are clear. Successful hubs actively nurture these relationships, ensuring trust, open communication, and mutual benefit. Deep partnerships take time, intention, and energy, and not all relationships need to be equally intensive—the goal is alignment, not depth for depth's sake.
- **Operational Stability:** Clear systems, well-defined roles, and effective coordination contribute to smooth day-to-day operations. Continued investment in staff and volunteer support, succession planning, and process improvements ensures that operational stability is maintained even as the hub grows or adapts.
- **Financial Viability:** Diversifying income sources and maintaining contingency reserves enable hubs to weather lean periods and invest in strategic initiatives. Revisiting financial models periodically ensures that revenue streams, funding, and cost structures remain aligned with hub goals. Financial viability is strengthened when hubs secure reliable, year-over-year investment rather than relying solely on self-generated revenue. For example, local governments or other champions may invest in food hubs if they recognize the broader value of food hubs in supporting community food resilience, local economic development, job creation, and emergency preparedness.
- **Community Connection and Visibility:** Engaging with producers, entrepreneurs, First Nations, and the wider community reinforces the hub's relevance and impact. Success is strengthened by maintaining visibility, championing shared values, and fostering authentic participation in the hub's work.
- **Continuous Learning and Adaptation:** Regular evaluation, reflection, and knowledge-sharing—both internally and with peers—allow hubs to make informed course corrections, implement best practices, and evolve offerings to meet changing needs.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL FOOD ECOSYSTEMS

One of the most critical roles of a food hub is connecting local farmers, producers, and processors with markets, including institutional buyers. Yet this work can be deprioritized if revenue pressures or short-term financial considerations take precedence over long-term food system goals.

Some considerations for maintaining this work over time:

Understand that distribution, aggregation, and processing are interdependent. A hub may need to collaborate regionally to ensure all parts of the system function well.

Build strong relationships with farmers and producers. Strong, trust-based relationships with farmers and producers are at the heart of a successful food hub. Taking the time to understand their realities, capacities, and challenges helps ensure long-term collaboration and a resilient local food system.

- Recognize that farming can be financially challenging and that many producers diversify income or hold other jobs to make ends meet. Appreciate that some times of year, like harvest, are extremely busy, while others, like winter, may allow for more collaboration.
- Recognize that farms are often both businesses and passion projects—farmers do this work because they love it, care deeply about connecting to the land, and want to provide healthy, nourishing local food.
- Not all farmers have the same needs, and those needs can shift over time. Stay in regular communication, be responsive to changes in production, and look for ways to strengthen trust and long-term collaboration.
- Connect with other organizations that have successful, supportive relationships with farmers to learn and share strategies.
- Treat farms as businesses and consider offering or connecting them with support for business planning, operational management, and financial sustainability.



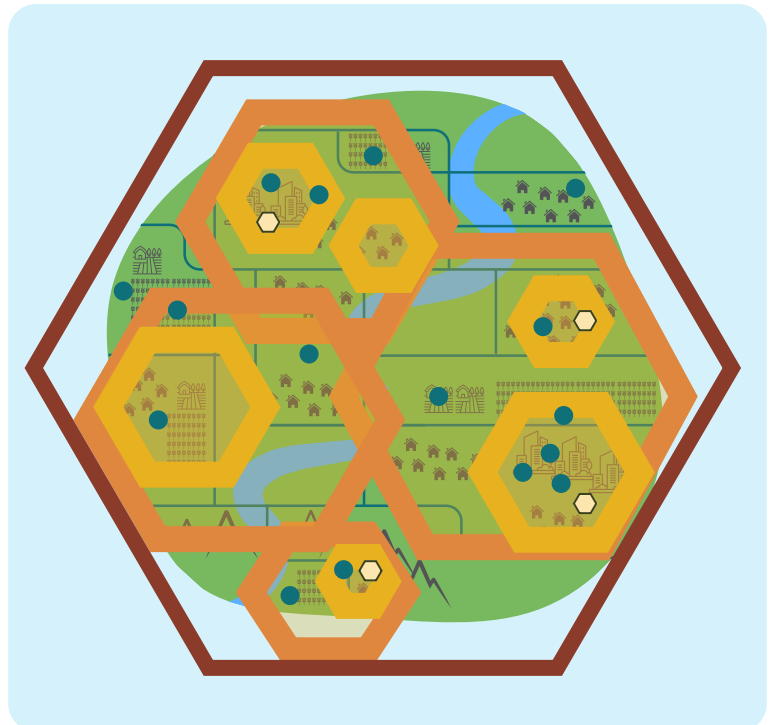
STRENGTHENING LOCAL FOOD ECOSYSTEMS

Engage institutional buyers and strengthen local food supply chains. Food hubs can play a central role in identifying solutions across the supply chain and connecting producers with buyers in a way that is feasible, resilient, and aligned with local food system goals. That said, a gap currently exists between the volume of food institutional buyers require and the capacity of the local food system to consistently supply it.

- It can be helpful to start with smaller pilot projects, such as individual schools or health care facilities, to test approaches and gradually scale up to larger buyers or institutions such as health authorities or school boards.
- Focus on building specific pieces of the supply chain—such as aggregation, processing, or transportation—while keeping an eye on how they connect to the broader ecosystem. Where gaps exist, support capacity-building for both producers and buyers, including regulatory compliance, logistics, or operational coordination. It can also be helpful to advocate for policies and practices that support local food systems.

Take a regional and interregional approach. Building strong connections beyond your own hub can help you maximize impact and make the most of limited resources. By thinking regionally and interregionally, you can strengthen local food systems while creating new opportunities for producers and buyers.

- Collaborate with other food hubs, producers, and sector organizations to identify gaps, avoid duplicating efforts, and strengthen local food systems.
- Stay connected with partners both within and beyond your region. Keep a clear sense of what initiatives are underway and be ready to leverage opportunities as they arise.
- Think about how your hub can fit into a broader regional network. Different hubs can contribute unique infrastructure or specializations, creating more viable markets for value-added farm products and making the most of shared resources.





CASE STUDIES

THE STIR

Building from Community Needs and Partnerships

This Food Hub provides commercial kitchen rentals, business mentorship, and support to help local food entrepreneurs start and scale up their business. The Stir specializes in canning, dehydration, specialty food processing, and packaging equipment suitable for processors, bakers, caterers, and food trucks. Stir Makers (clients) are able to rent dry and cold storage, warehouse space, as well as a pop-up retail storefront and rentable indoor and outdoor event space.

LOCATION	ORGANIZATION	TYPE	ESTABLISHED	PERSONNEL
Kamloops, BC	Kamloops Food Policy Council	Non-Profit, Registered Charity	2022	5

Organizations Involved: Community Centered Non-Profits, Regional and Provincial Funding Agencies, Academic and Government Institutions, Economic Interest Groups, Growers, Producers, Processors (value added, catering), Distributors, and Buyers.

Key Lessons

Start by understanding who is already doing food work.

Decades before the existence of The Stir, the founding organizers of the Kamloops Food Policy Council recognized the need to establish relationships founded on trust with numerous organizations, producers, decision-makers, and fellow food sovereign enthusiasts within the Kamloops Region. This relationship brokering mindset proved to be the bedrock for the thriving connective nature of both KFPC and their Food Hub, The Stir.

Consider partnerships

One example of the Stir's many collaborations can be seen in their partnership with Authentic Indigenous Seafood, a local Indigenous fisher cooperative. Both organizations were able to secure funding to improve The Stir Warehouse by constructing a large-scale walk-in freezer and offer dry warehouse storage. The cooperative uses The Stir as their distribution hub in the BC Interior to establish vital links in the food processing and distribution system that are often a challenge due to the vast distance between centres. This partnership went beyond an infrastructure upgrade, but looking at how an equitable partnership can influence a region's food system through localized means.

Why is this important?

The Stir is an example of the importance of establishing relationships with potential partners early and often, as the trust that is needed often takes years to form. This is especially true for Indigenous organizations and businesses. Trust is the foundation of relationships and its importance cannot be understated. It is about what organizations can achieve collaboratively and equitably.

How do you know if you are making progress?

Reviewing the status of past projects or the relationships that were maintained and those that were newly formed are examples of how food hubs can understand their progress on this topic. KFPC reports annually on its collaborations and networking, describing their different projects and partnerships. Understanding this can help you to build on what exists and act as a connector.

“OUR FOOD HUB IS A NETWORK OF SHARED KITCHEN FACILITIES, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES SPREAD OUT ACROSS KAMLOOPS AND THE SURROUNDING REGION. ACTING LIKE A MYCELIUM - A NETWORK OF MICROSCOPIC STRANDS CONNECTING MUSHROOMS AND THE SURROUNDING ECOSYSTEM - WE WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO CONNECT AND STRENGTHEN OUR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM.”

— The Stir Website

To Learn More: <https://www.thestir.kitchen/>

SPROUT KITCHEN

Scaling Local Food Reach Through Distribution

This Food Hub is a small-scale food processing and innovation hub that serves the North Cariboo Region. Sprout Kitchen provides space and support for emerging and existing food entrepreneurs to get their ideas off the ground or scale their business for new markets. It offers new and established food businesses and community groups access to shared processing infrastructure, including processing and testing equipment, food business advisory services, product development services, analytic services, applied research opportunities, and education and training related to food processing and food safety. Sprout Kitchen is an initiative of the City of Quesnel with support from the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Northern Development Initiative Trust.

LOCATION	ORGANIZATION	TYPE	ESTABLISHED
Quesnel, BC	City of Quesnel	Local Government	2022

Organizations Involved: Community Centered Non-Profits, Municipal and Provincial Funding Agencies, Economic Interest Groups, Producers, Processors, and Distributors.

Key Lesson: Support regional distribution and logistics

Sprout Kitchen's refrigerated delivery van, accommodating fresh, dry, and frozen products, is essential to serving the region. The van allows the Sprout Kitchen to serve the region beyond the hub in Quesnel, connecting smaller communities throughout the area, and offering flexible pick-up and drop-off locations.

Delivery Locations

100 Mile House, Prince George, Quesnel, Vanderhoof, and Williams Lake.

Delivery Van Specs

High Roof, Ford Transit Cargo Van with Reefer Unit & Insulated Storage.

Why is this important?

The Sprout helps address a long-standing barrier of transportation in northern BC. With communities spread across vast distances, producers face higher transportation costs than their counterparts in other regions. Existing distribution companies typically require larger production volumes and prioritize delivery to major centers, leaving smaller-scale regional transport underserved. Sprout Kitchen fills this gap by offering transportation tailored to smaller producers operating at a regional level. This service exemplifies how food hubs can identify and solve localized challenges by developing services that meet their community's specific needs.

How do you know if you are making progress?

There are a number of potential ways to track progress. One method would be to track indicators like an increase in sales of local food to new locations or a change in the number of available delivery routes. You could also reflect on the impact of changes with staff involved or customers using the service, to gain their perspectives on whether the changes have been helping them. This can help you to understand if you're reducing reliance on external supply chains and building local capacity.

To Learn More: <https://www.sproutkitchen.ca>

FIREWEED HUB

Diversifying Services to Support Local Sustainability

The idea of Fireweed was championed by a group of residents with the initial vision of a vibrant, well-equipped and flexible shared workspace as a way to ensure the region's communities would be sustainable for the growth of the region. In partnership with local government, the group was successful in procuring seed money to engage with the community and workshop ideas of how this vision could be a reality with consideration of the diverse end users. The goal grew to be the creation of community workspace that would also function as a food centre with a full commercial kitchen. This expanded vision took root thanks to the support of the Healthy Community Society and a few key community members who had long been advocating for a food centre in the area. Today the services available at Fireweed include cowork space with rentable desks and meeting rooms, as well as a commercial kitchen space and equipment rentals, and a culinary tool library for off-site usage.

LOCATION	ORGANIZATION	TYPE	ESTABLISHED
New Denver, BC	Fireweed Hub Society	Non-Profit	May 2024

Organizations Involved: Community Centered Non-Profits, Regional and Provincial Funding Agencies, Economic Interest Groups.

Key Lesson: Think regionally and strategically

Understanding not only the diversity of your community's needs but also the diverse needs of multiple communities in a region can create new partnerships. Related benefits can include additional grant opportunities, sharing the workload, and additional service offerings to serve a wide range of users.

Why is this important?

When disasters happen, like the 2024 wildfire season that impacted the region where Fireweed is located, local assets can be leveraged to help with response and recovery. A multi-purpose facility with the co-location of different services offered multiple opportunities for assistance and support.

How do you know if you are making progress?

Understanding what's happening around you can help your hub find its place. Researching various community and regional needs through existing reports can assist in understanding what some additional needs of the area might be. Further, ensuring you have open communication with key groups who understand the needs of the region, like local government or Community Futures. Expanding your presence at events and meetings you might not normally attend helps you to identify gaps that your organization could fill through more organic methods of communication.

“FIREWEED IS A PIONEER. ITS TINY SEEDS RIDE THE WIND LIKE PARACHUTES AND BEGIN NEW LIFE WHERE FATE CARRIES THEM. WHETHER IN CLEAR-CUTS, ON ROADSIDES OR OLD BURNS, FIREWEED PLANTS ITSELF AND RISES UP STEADFAST AND STRONG. BUT IT RARELY STANDS SOLO: A SINGLE FIREWEED PLANT BUILDS A THRIVING COMMUNITY THROUGH SPREADING SEEDS AND LATERAL ROOT NETWORKS, AND IT READIES THE SOIL FOR SUCCESSION TOWARDS A DIVERSE AND BALANCED ECOSYSTEM.”

— Fireweed Hub Website

To Learn More: <https://fireweedhub.ca/>

THE DOCK+

Strengthening Regional Food Systems Through a Clear Niche

The Dock+ is a shared processing space with a commercial kitchen owned by the Port Alberni Port Authority at Fishermen's Harbour. In addition to offering processing services, the Hub also offers business incubation through growth, development, and collaboration.

LOCATION	ORGANIZATION	TYPE	ESTABLISHED	PERSONNEL
Port Alberni, BC	Port Alberni Port Authority	Port Authority	2021	15+
Organizations Involved: Community Centered Non-Profits, Municipal, Regional, and Provincial Funding Agencies, Economic Interest Groups, Growers and Producers, and Processors.				

Key Lesson: Ground your work in your local context.

The services offered at The Dock + are grounded in the reality of what is being produced in the region, aquaculture/seafood. The hub has recognized its place in the food system of the Alberni Valley by primarily focusing on a dominant agri-food sector while still offering services through kitchen space and equipment for other food sectors to thrive.

How do you know if you're making progress?

Concrete indicators related to context and place are challenging. In this case, conversations with staff, collaborators, and clients can help you to reflect on whether the mandate of your hub is striking the right balance of being focused on local needs and context, while staying open to possibilities.

Why is this important?

By tapping into the region's fishing industry, the Hub was able to centre itself in being a premier Seafood Hub. Their success was reflected in 2024 when the Dock + was able to secure funding for a significant expansion to its facility in partnership with Nova Harvest and HFN Fisheries LP. The project sought to improve distribution, expansion of cold storage facilities, integrate new technology, and increase processing capacity, while enhancing seafood accessibility and affordability through various means of cost reduction. All while allowing for further growth in the seafood processing industry for First Nations and non-First Nations on Vancouver Island.

“THE EXPANSION OF DOCK+ PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PORT ALBERNI TO FURTHER ITS POSITION AS A LEADER ON THE WEST COAST IN THE FISH AND SEAFOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY, WHILE DOING SO IN A WAY THAT IS LONG-TERM AND SUSTAINABLE.”

– Sharie Minions, Mayor of Port Alberni

To Learn More: <https://thedockplus.ca/>

KOOTENAY FARMS FOOD HUB INNOVATION CENTRE

Supporting Local Producers Through Value-Added Processing

The Kootenay Farms Food Hub provides a collaborative, friendly space where producers and community members can use processing equipment at affordable rates to create their own retail-ready food products and delectable innovations. The Hub acts as a gathering space where ideas can be exchanged, connections can be made, and folks can learn the various manufacturing and processing techniques offered at the Hub.

LOCATION	ORGANIZATION	TYPE	ESTABLISHED	PERSONNEL
Creston, BC	The Fields Forward Society	Non-Profit	2021	3+

Organizations Involved: Community Centered Non-Profits, Regional and Provincial Funding Agencies, Economic Interest Groups, Growers and Producers, and Processors.

Key Lesson: Prioritize value-added production that supports local farmers and regional ingredients

Local producers identified a range of processing needs that would help them to realize the full value of their crops. The Fields Forward Society was formed in 2016 with the mandate to sustainably accelerate Creston's diverse agricultural potential and serve local needs. Prior to the opening of the Food Hub this included securing and operating a mobile fruit and vegetable press, as well as an online marketplace ordering service for local products. When the Kootenay Farms Food Hub was established, local producers were top of mind for services and equipment, including dry and cold storage space, freeze-dry equipment, and automatic labeling and packaging.

Why is this important?

The Creston Valley produces the majority of the agri-food commodities in the Kootenay region. So, there is a natural fit for a Hub to aid in the value-added processing of the diverse products. With the majority of these producers being small-scale operators, there is a greater demand for the utilization of shared processing equipment to further reduce operating costs on these smaller producers.

How do you know if you are making progress?

One approach is to track the usage of equipment and services offered. Another is discussing with your producers their thoughts on the services being offered to gain their perspective and suggestions on potential changes. By serving local producers this helps ensure the hub contributes directly to regional food system resilience, as opposed to relying on ingredients brought in from elsewhere.

To Learn More: <https://www.kootenayfarms.ca/>

THE VALLEY KITCHEN & SQUAMISH FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Lessons to Enhance Financial Viability

Financial viability is one of the most significant challenges facing Food Hubs. In order to strengthen financial viability, there are many different approaches to diversifying revenue streams and securing funding.

The following two cases provide examples of innovative approaches to financial viability.

The Valley Kitchen - Fee for Service

The Valley Kitchen is a privately operated Food Hub. It opened in May 2017 and offers kitchen rentals, consulting services, and operates a public-facing cafe. Their goal was to create a dynamic hub where local businesses could thrive and grow, groups could gather to collaborate and exchange knowledge/skills, and where the community could gather. These goals were crafted by listening to the community about what was needed.

Kitchen rentals at the Valley Kitchen are fee for service. Their website offers a straightforward and accessible user experience for potential fee for service clients. They have their full price list of kitchen space and equipment rentals available for potential customers to see and make a decision based on the already existing information. This aspect of providing basic information that the consumer needs to make an informed decision ensures a positive outcome regardless of whether the consumer uses the services. This approach can help to minimize confusion over fees and minimize staff time taken up by basic inquiries – helping with capacity.

To Learn More:

www.thevalleykitchen.ca/

Squamish Food Policy Council - Local Government Partnership

In 2015, the Squamish Food Policy Council (SFPC) was formed to further sustainable food systems work in Squamish and the Sea-to-Sky region. Their mission is to ensure everyone in the region has access to enough nutritious, safe, ecologically sustainable, and culturally appropriate food at all times. Additionally, the SFPC seeks to ensure that Squamish Valley food and agricultural lands are protected and productive, and producers, processors, growers, foragers, and knowledge holders are valued and supported.

The Squamish Food Policy Council has various methods to secure operational funding. The main aspect is to ensure a broadened network of organizations and government representatives know who you are and what your organization does. This ensures you are at the top of mind for funding opportunities you might not be aware of. Additional methods include seeking matched funding from various funding sources, service agreements, and producing various consulting works in the Food System, both community and agriculture.

To Learn More:

www.squamishfoodpolicycouncil.com/

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Topic	Resource
Engaging Indigenous communities, understanding worldviews on Indigenous food sovereignty, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Cooking in Two Worlds Guide Working in a Good Way <i>Note - These resources may not best suited for your specific context.</i>
Asset Mapping	Roadmap for Clty Food Sector Innovation & Investment
Business Planning	BC Business Plan Guidebook and Template
Evaluation & Assessment	Evaluation of the Intervale Center Food Hub Taking Stock Self Assessment Tool Evaluation of Fireweed Food Hub
Exporting	Importing Food Products into the United States How to Navigate Export Market Regulations and Requirements Step-by-Step Guide to Exporting Exporting Food: A step-by-step guide Regulatory Requirements: Trading food <i>Note - These resources may not be current to evolving international trade policy.</i>

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Topic	Resource
Feasibility Studies & Food System Studies	<u>Food Economy and Food Hub Assessment</u> <u>Simcoe County Regional Food Distribution Hub</u> <u>Food Hubs: Central Puget Sound Food System Assessment</u> <u>Pathways to a Hub and Spoke Food Hub Model in the City of Vancouver</u> <u>District of Saanich Food Hub Feasibility Study</u> <u>Food Economy & Food Hub Assessment Regional District of Bulkley Nechako</u> <u>Kamloops Food Processing and Innovation Hub Feasibility Pilot</u>
Financials	<u>Assessing Financial Viability</u> <u>A Manager's Guide to Food Hub Finances</u>
Food Safety	<u>HACCP and Food Safety Planning</u> <u>Food safety in processing</u>

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Topic	Resource
Networks, Relationship-building, and Regional Development	A Case Study in Building Effective Networks for Food System Change Northwest Food Hub Network
Operations & Lessons Learned	Lessons Learned from the Field Best Practices Guidebook: Food Hub Vendor Manual (AB) US National Food Hub Survey
Shared Kitchen Models & Toolkits	Shared Kitchen Industry Overview and Models Toolkit
Standard Operating Procedures, Templates, & Documentation	Transportation, Purchasing, Receiving, Shipping, and Storage Equipment Design, Installation, Maintenance, and Calibration Personnel Training Premises Management
User Agreements	User Agreement Templates

GLOSSARY/INDEX A-C

This combined glossary-index defines select key terms and points you to relevant pages throughout the text. Rather than defining everything, it focuses on vocabulary that might be unfamiliar to some readers, or terminology that has a specific meaning in the context of food hubs.

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Adaptability	17, 29, 43, 44, 46, 47
Aggregation: Collecting and consolidating products from multiple sources for further processing, packaging, storage, and/or sale and distribution.	14 ,25, 48, 49
Alternative Food Network: A broad term used to describe a system or network that differs from the conventional food system by being place-based and emphasizing shorter supply chains, local sourcing, and sustainable practices that contribute to building sustainable and resilient food systems.	9
Asset Mapping	8, 57
Business Planning	44, 57
Clients / Client Recruitment	18, 27, 28, 47
Communications	23, 25, 27, 46, 47
Conflict and Challenges	23, 27, 47
Decision Making	10, 22, 23, 25, 26, 30, 45

GLOSSARY/INDEX D-F

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Distribution: "How we move the food we eat from farms, ranches, and processing sites to farmers markets, grocery stores, food cooperatives, food hubs, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and wholesalers. Distribution also includes the transportation and business logistics needed to make it all happen." 1. The Full Circle of Local Food Systems. Maria Henn, ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture. https://attra.ncat.org/the-full-circle-of-local-food-systems/?utm	25, 48, 51, 52, 54
Engagement	7, 10, 16, 23, 25, 46
Equipment / Equipment Choice	24, 52, 53, 55, 59
Evaluation	29, 30-41, 57
Exporting	57
Facility / Facility Location / Facility Configuration	14, 24, 47
Feasibility Study	7, 13, 45, 58
Financials / Financing / Financial Viability / Financial Mangement	8, 18, 25, 28, 36, 43, 44, 47, 58
First Nations and Indigenous Communities	10, 22, 51, 57
Food Hub: A place-based organization that aims to contribute to a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable local food system by strengthening connections among local and regional food producers, eaters, and communities. Food Hub / Food Hub Defined / Food Hub Roles / Food Hub Models	4, 14, 15, 16

GLOSSARY/INDEX

F-N

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Food Security/ Food System Resilience: Everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty. “Food security” is often used to encompass either or both of the following concepts: • Household food security: Inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.¹This is on an individual household level. Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices.² • Resilient local and regional food systems: Food security can also be threatened at a community level, due to climate change, contamination of land and water, unstable food supply chains and high food and transportation costs.³Resilient food systems work to address these factors to ensure that the entire community has access to food. 1. Household Food Insecurity in Canada, https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/ 2. Defining food security food insecurity in British Columbia, BC Center for Disease Control http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/FoodSecurity_FoodInsecurity_Definitions_FINAL.pdf 3. Defining food security food insecurity in British Columbia, BC Center for Disease Control http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/FoodSecurity_FoodInsecurity_Definitions_FINAL.pdf	9, 48, 49
Food Sovereignty: The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. 1. What is Food Sovereignty? La Via Campesina. https://viacampesina.org/en/what-is-food-sovereignty/	10, 57
Governance	15, 17, 26, 46
Grant Funding	15, 19, 20

GLOSSARY/INDEX

H-P

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Human Resources (Staff & Volunteers)	12, 26, 46
Institutional Buyers: Organizations that purchase food to meet their operational needs. This may include hospitals, schools, care homes, youth clubs, prisons, and workplaces. Institutional buyers often require: • Consistent, high-volume supply • Specific food safety requirements • Specialized products to fit service and clientele needs • Competitive pricing 1.Grube-Cavers, A., Tatebe, K., Polasub, W., Augustinowicz, G., Mullinix, K. Okanagan Bioregion Institutional Procurement Study, Summary Report. Richmond British Columbia: Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2018.	49
Needs Assessment	7, 8, 10, 13, 58
Partner: In the context of this report, a partner can be any actor that is working with the food hub to achieve a common goal. Partners may include: • The private sector ◦ Small businesses, investors, venture capital • Local, regional, provincial, or national government • Indigenous Nations and organizations • Non-profits Partnerships / Partnership Organizations / Partnership Types / Relationship Building	8, 11, 12, 19, 22, 23, 28, 35, 46, 47, 51
Production: This typically refers to primary production; where crops or livestock are grown/raised/caught/foraged and harvested.	18, 48

GLOSSARY/INDEX

R-S

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Processing/ Value-Added Production: The transformation of products harvested in production, though sometimes products may go through multiple stages of processing. This may include but is not limited to: • Cleaning • Sorting • Packaging • Processing milk into cheese or butter • Butchering and/or smoking and curing meats • Freezing or canning vegetables • Producing prepared foods or beverages 1. Sharif, M. K., Zahid, A., & Shah, F. H. (2018). Role of food product development in increased food consumption and value addition. In A. M. Grumezescu & A. M. Holban (Eds.), Food processing for increased quality and consumption (pp. 455–479). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-811447-6.00015-1 2. Xie J, Brownell K. Nutritious food procurement in cities in low- and middle-income countries: Case studies on Addis Ababa Students Feeding Agency and Pune Sassoon General Hospital Meal Programme. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Working Paper #7. Geneva, Switzerland, 2020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.7	5, 16, 18, 55
Revenue	18, 19, 43, 47
Software	24, 25, 32
Standard Operating Procedures	59
Supply Chain: The network of actors, processes, and infrastructure involved in moving food from its origin to the consumer. Includes production, processing, distribution, retail, and consumption.	16, 18, 31, 49, 52

GLOSSARY/INDEX

S-Z

Topic	Guide Page(s)
Sustainability: In the context of food hubs, sustainability refers to the hub's ability to remain viable and effective over the long term—operationally, financially, environmentally, and socially. It is about building a hub that endures and continues to meet community needs while adapting to change. This guide focuses primarily on financial viability and operational stability, which are foundational to long-term success, but acknowledges that environmental and social sustainability are equally essential to resilient local food systems. • Operational stability: Operational stability is the ability to run the hub effectively and predictably while adapting to change without constant crisis management. Stable hubs have clear structures, reliable processes, and trusted relationships that allow them to maintain consistent services and respond to evolving community and regional needs. • Financial viability: Financial viability means having reliable and diversified resources to sustain the hub's operations and vision over time. It involves combining earned revenue, stable grants, and partner support to cover ongoing costs and enable future investment. Financially sustainable hubs plan ahead, manage risk, and build adaptability rather than aiming to eliminate all vulnerability. • Environmental sustainability: Environmental sustainability focuses on protecting and regenerating natural systems that food hubs depend on. This includes minimizing waste, supporting regenerative or low-impact production, reducing emissions, and designing resource-efficient infrastructure that contributes to long-term ecological health. • Social sustainability: Social sustainability emphasizes equity, inclusion, and community well-being. Food hubs advance social sustainability by fostering fair working conditions, equitable access to food, collaboration across diverse partners, and respect for Indigenous food sovereignty—helping build a just and connected local food system.	8, 18, 22, 29, 43, 44
Values	9, 22, 45
Vision	9, 10, 20, 23, 44, 45