Large-Scale Innovations for Food Systems Transformation

This chapter is organized into four sections.

We start with the **Objectives**, which outline the five goals guiding the Large-Scale Innovations funding stream's relationship-based, systems-focused approach. We then describe the **Funding Design,** outlining the relationship-based approach PHABC and FBBC used to identify partners, structure flexible funding, and support initiatives through design and implementation.



Photo: Northern Routes Food Network.

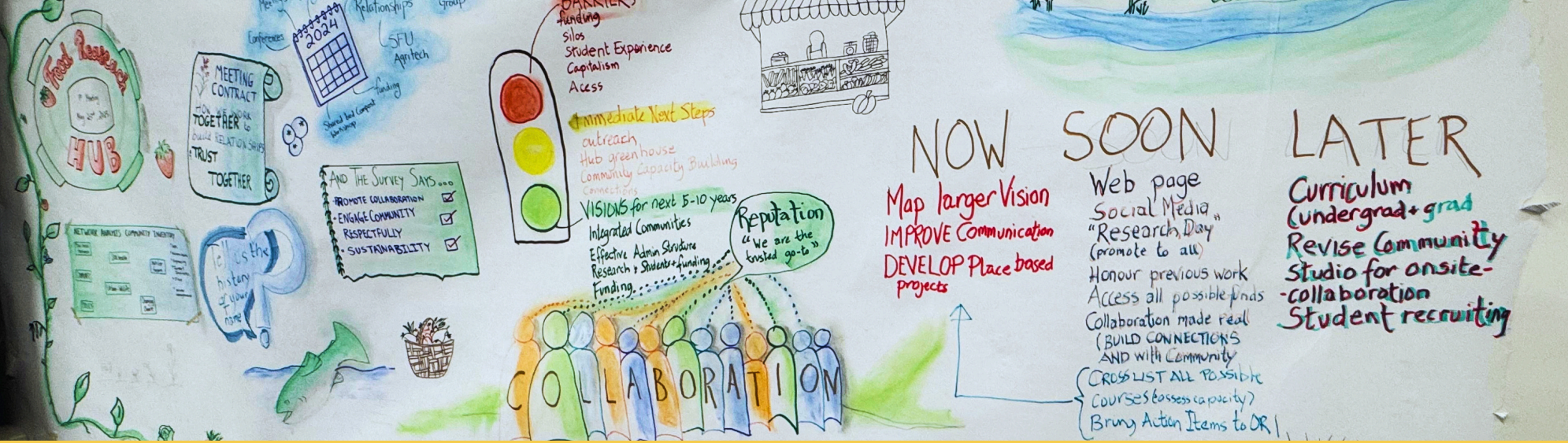


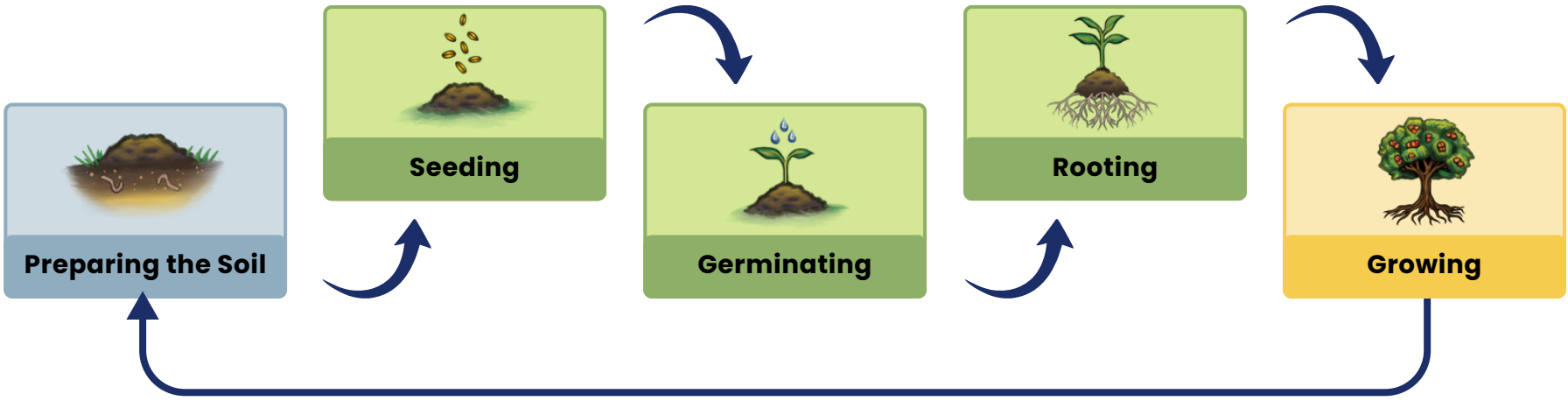
Photo: UNBC Food Research Hub.

Next, we turn to **Impact of Funding,** detailing the seven funded initiatives and their sustainability outcomes, and drawing on final reports to trace six themes of change: from isolation to connection and belonging; from charity to community-driven models; from limited capacity to strong skills and leadership; from fragmented efforts to strengthening networks and systems; from exclusion to equity and inclusion; and from short-term relief to long-term food systems transformation.

We close with the **Key Learnings** that reflect on the value of sustained pre-implementation planning, the importance of pairing infrastructure investment with human capacity, and the role of cross-community collaboration.

Table 7: Large-Scale at a glance

Grantees funded	7 targeted initiatives
Total funding distributed	$1.7 million (grants ranged from $50,000 to $744,995 per initiative)
Geographic reach	Prince George, Fraser Lake, Prince Rupert, Sik-E-Dakh, and Fort St. John, with Northern Routes Food Network extending to communities from Prince George to Fort Nelson.
Types of funded initiatives	A coordinated food distribution network, a community commercial kitchen, campus food security programs, a school farm, an Indigenous nursery and food forest, a comprehensive school-community food system, and a meat processing facility.
FSTT framework connection	Large-Scale Innovations primarily advanced the **Growing** stage of transformation through targeted funding, shared learning, and collaborative studies, that drove collective action and strengthened social movements across the food system. Elements of earlier stages were also woven in: Seeding and Germinating, through relationship-building, meetings, and site visits that connected partners and strengthened networks; and Rooting, through empowering community leaders and supporting the co-creation of knowledge.



Objectives

The Large-Scale Innovations funding stream aimed to strengthen the capacity of partner organizations to develop, implement, and scale innovative food systems solutions across Northern BC. Its design was informed by several food access studies that highlighted the realities of northern and remote communities. PHABC's *2021 Food Access Across BC* study surveyed food access organizations across the province following the COVID-19 pandemic and found that northern communities face unique challenges and opportunities requiring tailored, self-determined strategies.

The *2022 Strengthening Food Systems and Dignified Food Access in Northern BC* study, led by PHABC and FBBC, identified a need for enhanced coordination, collaboration, capacity-building, and sustained funding to support the work of northern organizations. The *2024 Understanding Local Food Culture in the Prince George, BC Area* study, led by the College of New Caledonia in partnership with PHABC, highlighted pathways to improve regional food access and food literacy education.

Based on these findings, the funding stream prioritized relationship-building, flexible funding, ongoing capacity-building support for tailored, community-driven initiatives, networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities, business and sustainability planning support, and connections to additional funding opportunities, partners, and resources.

Rather than using a fixed application portal and deadline, PHABC and FBBC worked collaboratively alongside selected grantees as they designed and refined their initiatives, timelines, and work plans addressing the complexity of the work and the varying levels of readiness and evolving needs surfaced along the way. This support extended beyond the funding itself: PHABC and FBBC offered consultation on business and sustainability planning, helped initiatives pursue additional funding opportunities, and connected them with relevant partners, networks and resources. Together, these supports aimed to strengthen the long-term impact and sustainability of funded initiatives.

The objectives of the Large-Scale Innovations funding stream were to:

1. **Provide a low-barrier, relationship-based support** to grantees throughout the design and implementation of their initiatives.
2. **Invest in solutions that model food systems transformation,** advancing more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems in Northern BC, while generating learnings that can inform food systems work in other regions across the province.
3. **Build regional resilience** by facilitating knowledge exchange among food systems actors to collectively address barriers and implement shared solutions.
4. **Improve food access** by supporting community-centred solutions that enhance local food systems.
5. **Support long-term sustainability** by strengthening business planning, funding and partnership pathways for initiatives, while contributing to broader systemic change through policy, collaboration, and lasting improvements in food systems.

As the first funding stream of its kind delivered by PHABC and FBBC in Northern BC, Large-Scale Innovations demonstrated the value of pairing flexible, relationship-based funding with sustained guidance. An extended, relationship-driven planning period proved foundational to building the trust, alignment, and readiness needed for initiatives to take root.

Grantees benefited not only from funding but from partnerships, shared learning, and capacity-building support that helped position their work for sustainability beyond the funding period. Investments in shared infrastructure created lasting community assets, while cross-community collaboration and peer learning strengthened a broader regional network across Northern BC.

Through this work, Large-Scale Innovations advanced PHABC and FBBC's strategic goals by investing in solutions that model food systems transformation and by driving systemic change through lasting infrastructure and stronger regional networks.



Photo: UNBC Prince George Public Interest Research Group Community Garden.



Photo: Northern Routes Food Network.



Photo: North Coast Food Hub - Planting the Seeds for Food Sustainability, Security, and Sovereignty in the North.



Photo: Sik-E-Dakh local smokehouse.

Funding Design

The Large-Scale Innovations funding stream ran from January 2024 to March 2026, supporting seven initiatives across Northern BC. It was designed based on existing relationships with Rapid Stimulus Grant and Ideas Lab participants, helping to identify organizations with the readiness and capacity to lead complex food systems transformation initiatives.

Rather than using a standard open-call application process, potential initiatives were identified through a strategic, relationship-based, and collaborative approach. In alignment with Large-Scale's core objectives, this part of the design reduced barriers to participation by ensuring that organizations best positioned to drive meaningful food systems transformation in Northern BC were identified and supported, rather than those most experienced in navigating competitive grant processes.

The implementation of the Large-Scale Innovations program was divided into two phases (see **Figure 8**). The first phase of the Large-Scale Innovations program focused on establishing strategic partnerships and identifying initiatives with strong potential for long-term sustainability, scalability, and regional impact.

This phase was designed to be low-barrier and relationship-driven, intentionally reflecting the project's core commitments to equity, regional resilience, and food systems transformation.

Instead of relying on a competitive open-call process, PHABC and FBBC invested time in collaborative scoping, cross-sector relationship-building, and community engagement to ensure that funding reached organizations best positioned to lead meaningful, lasting change. By embedding these values into the foundation of the project, this phase set the conditions for initiatives that were not only innovative and community-rooted but also structured for long-term sustainability and scalability across Northern BC. For details on Phase 1 implementation, please see **Appendix K**.

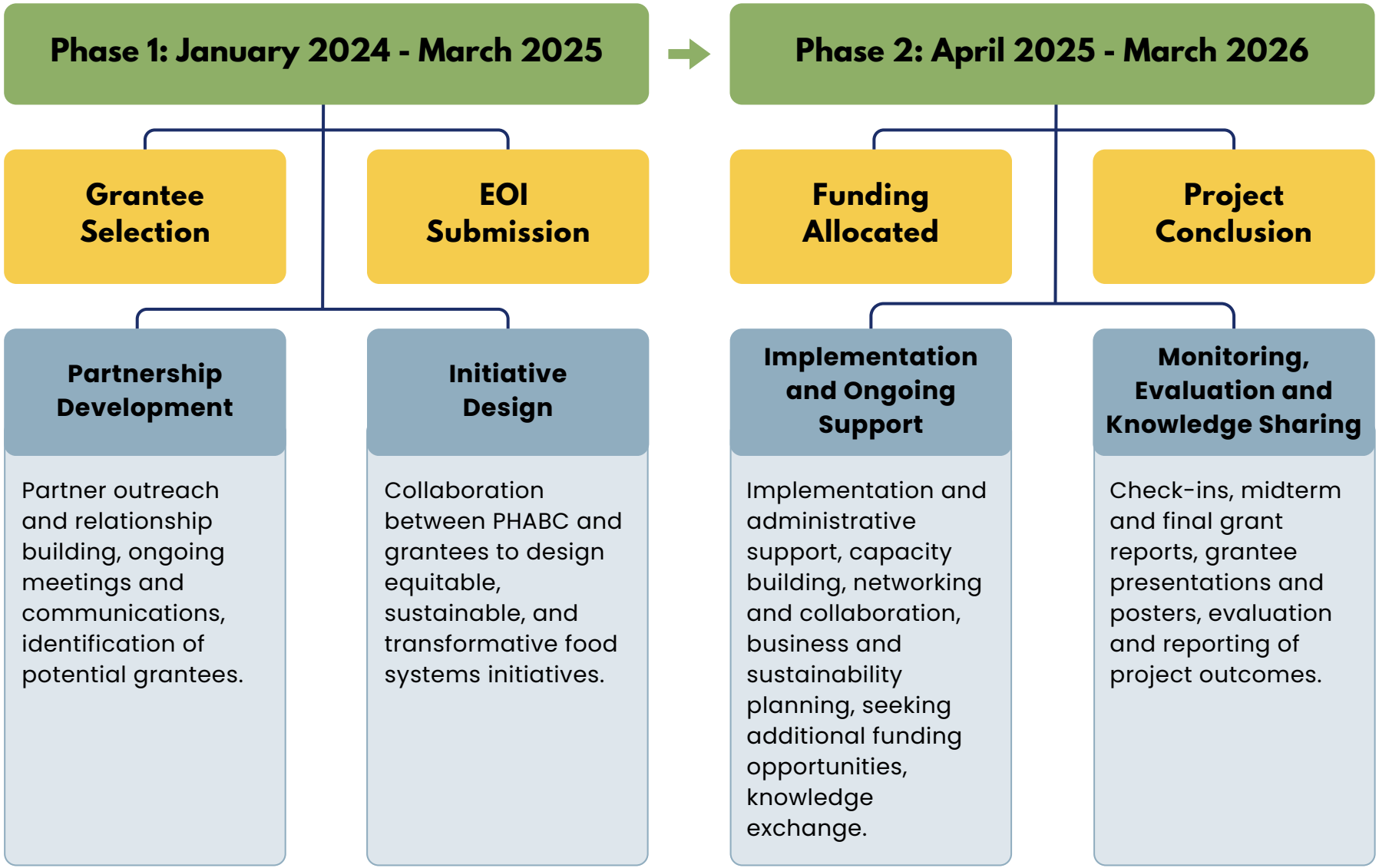


Photo: North Coast Food Hub - Planting the Seeds for Food Sustainability, Security, and Sovereignty in the North.

The second phase reflected the project's core belief that funding alone is insufficient to drive systemic change and that sustained, hands-on support was essential to help initiatives translate community-identified needs into lasting outcomes. PHABC and FBBC offered tailored support throughout the entire initiative lifecycle, from conceptualization and development to regular meetings and engagement with partner organizations as needed.

A full-time staff member based in the Traditional Territory of the Lheidli T'enneh in Prince George, along with other remote support staff, led this work, ensuring that PHABC and FBBC maintained a consistent place-based presence across the region. This ongoing investment in relationships and capacity building directly supported the project's goals of building regional resilience and long-term sustainability, helping initiatives develop the organizational strength needed to thrive well beyond the funding period. For details on Phase 2 implementation, please see **Appendix K.**

Figure 8: Large-Scale phases timeline



Engagement and Support

True to the funding stream's low-barrier, relationship-based design, PHABC and FBBC's engagement was intentional and sustained throughout. Team members conducted community visits with initiative teams, providing place-based consultation and hands-on support for events, workshops, and partnership or community meetings. This direct, on-the-ground engagement ensured support was responsive to each community's specific context and needs, while also building the organizational capacity, readiness, and conditions for initiatives to be successful, sustainable, and transformational. This support took several forms:

- **Partnership and Governance:** Cultivating and facilitating partnerships and offering governance recommendations to strengthen initiatives and grantees' organizational structures.
- **Capacity Building and Network Development:** Providing consultations, mentorship, and resource sharing to strengthen capacity, including peer-to-peer connections across the north. These connections were formalized through tools such as an offers-and-needs resource list, helping to knit together a regional network of food systems actors.
- **Sustainability and Business Planning:** Supporting long-term initiative sustainability in partnership with Greenchain Consulting.
- **Future Funding Support:** Assisting initiatives in identifying and pursuing future funding opportunities to support growth, scaling, and expansion.
- **Communications and Knowledge Sharing:** Advancing the project's broader reach through documentary development, website content and participation at the Northern Food Harvest Summit and follow-up networking.

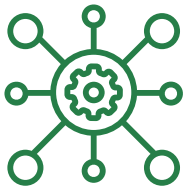
Grounded in the funding stream's objectives, the application process moved away from a one-size-fits-all model toward a collaborative, relationship-based review that prioritized community needs, innovation, and long-term impact. Rather than a standard scoring process, PHABC and FBBC engaged in ongoing conversations with potential partners to negotiate project elements and funding allocations, ensuring that the process was responsive to varying levels of organizational readiness and community context.

Applications were reviewed by members of PHABC and FBBC, assessed across five key themes (see **Figure 9**) and graded out of 100 points. Together, these criteria ensured that funded initiatives were not simply addressing immediate food needs, but actively contributing to broader, more equitable and resilient food systems across Northern BC. Full details on eligibility requirements and grading rubric are available in **Appendix L.**

Figure 9: Large-Scale grading rubric criteria

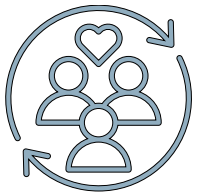
Organizational Resilience

- Demonstrates experience/ capacity to undertake the project;
- Has access to start-up/post-launch funding and suitable resources;
- Demonstrates financial responsibility;
- Partnerships and collaborations are in place.



Systems Impact

- Improves community food security;
- Supports food systems transformation;
- Serves a large number of people in a meaningful capacity;
- Fulfills a community or systems need.



Equity and Inclusion

- Serves an equity-deserving demographic;
- Includes diverse community members, including those with barriers to participation;
- Addresses systemic barriers to food access for equity-deserving communities.



Sustainable Project Design

- Key milestones and timeline are attainable and realistic;
- Ongoing capacity and sustainability is demonstrated;
- Positive impact on the planet (ecological footprint);
- Budget is feasible and realistic.



Innovation and Scalability

- Innovative approach addressing unique regional challenges;
- Can be replicated and scaled elsewhere;
- Addresses multiple food system components.

Business and Sustainability Planning

Recognizing that long-term sustainability requires more than a strong initiative idea, PHABC partnered with Greenchain Consulting to provide dedicated business and financial sustainability planning support to all seven funded initiatives. Financial sustainability was an intentionally designed core principle to ensure that selected initiatives were not only well-positioned at the outset, but, in some cases, were also supported through implementation with practical, hands-on guidance and structured oversight.

Through ongoing virtual and in-person meetings and staged business plan development, Greenchain worked alongside initiatives to examine their business models, address key financial sustainability questions, and develop comprehensive long-term plans for business and financial sustainability. This partnership was part of PHABC and FBBC's commitment to building organizational capacity that extends well beyond the project's timeline. It equipped initiative leads with the tools, knowledge, and strategic clarity needed to sustain and grow their work independently.

Greenchain's sustainability and business planning support was delivered in two key stages:

1. **Onboarding and Business Plan Support:**
   - Clarified shared goals, roles, and timelines at the outset of each initiative.
   - Worked with each initiative to turn its early vision into a ready-to-launch business and sustainability plan, covering purpose, community context, staffing, marketing, financial modelling, and risk.
   - Held virtual check-ins to ensure plans were updated accurately and on track as each initiative evolved.

2. **Launch and Ongoing Management Support:**
   - Finalized launch plans and set clear timelines, resource allocation, and milestones as initiatives moved from planning into action.
   - Continued supporting partners through early implementation, offering guidance on resource decisions, team coordination, and community and partner engagement.
   - Combined structured virtual check-ins with in-person meetings to stay closely connected with each initiative's progress.

Northern Harvest Food Summit: Seeding Sustainable Futures Through Food Collaboration

Large-Scale's initiatives were invited and supported to attend the Northern Harvest Food Summit, held from October 20–22, 2025, on the Traditional Territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation. Travel expenses were covered to support grantees' participation. Large-Scale's initiatives shared their work through a poster, which also served as mid-term reporting, and a 15-minute presentation to Summit Participants.

While most partners were represented, not all Large-Scale's initiatives were able to attend and present, as some were still in early inception stages. For more information, please see the Northern Harvest Food Summit Program or the Northern Harvest Food Summit Report.

See all project posters here:
https://cfsd-phabc.ca/project-posters/





Photos: Participants at the Northern Harvest Food Summit.



Photos: Large-Scale grant recipients presenting their initiatives at the Northern Food Summit





Photo: Northern Routes Food Network BC Bus.

Impact of Funding

Between early 2025 and March 2026, **$1.7 million** was allocated across seven initiatives with individual grants ranging from **$50,000.00** to **$744,995.00**. Granting timelines varied to reflect the dynamic, relationship-based process of initiative design, ensuring that each initiative was structurally sound and positioned for success before funding was disbursed, rather than rushing communities toward premature implementation.

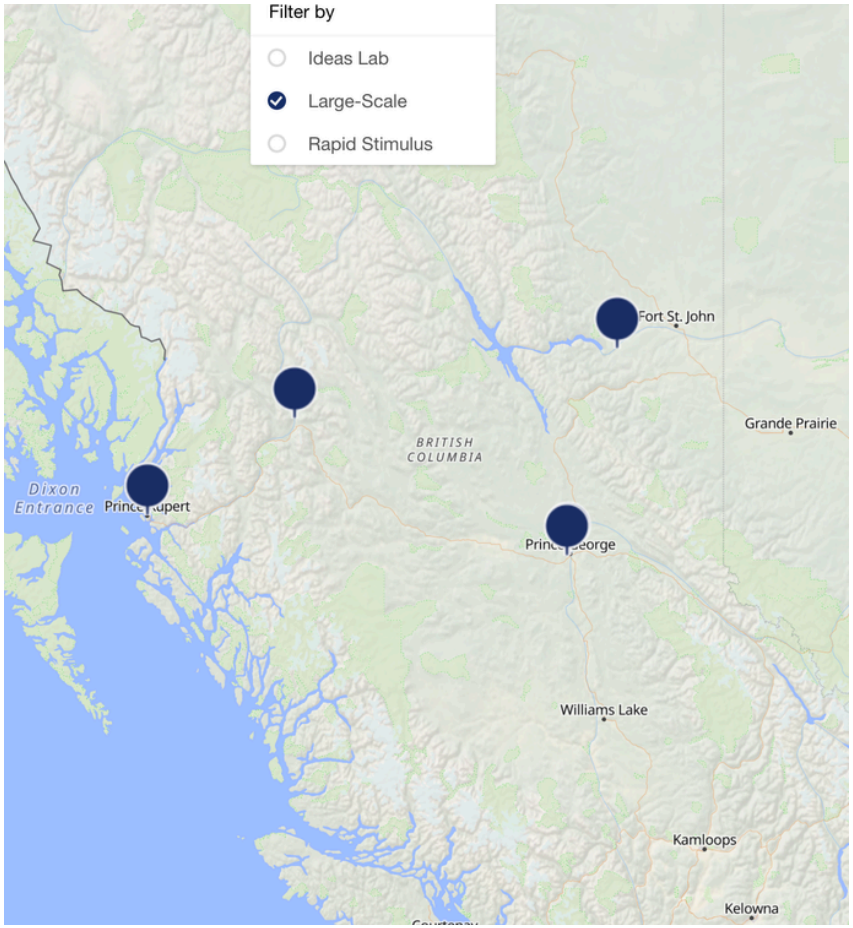
These initiatives collectively tested innovative, community-led solutions to some of the region's most pressing food systems challenges, improving food access, building regional resilience, enhancing organizational capacity, and generating models with potential for broader application across the province. Together, they demonstrated that place-based, community-led approaches, when properly resourced and supported, can drive meaningful, lasting food systems transformation.

The seven funded initiatives spanned a diverse range of food systems solutions, including:

- **Northern Routes Food Network**: a coordinated food distribution network engaging Northeast communities stretching from Prince George to Fort Nelson
- **Prince George Community Kitchen:** a community commercial kitchen in Prince George
- **UNBC Food Security:** campus food security programs at the University of Northern BC
- **Fraser Lake Elementary and Secondary School (FLESS) Farm:** a school farm in Fraser Lake
- **Ts'msyen Native Plant Nursery:** an Indigenous nursery and food forest
- **North Coast Food Hub:** a comprehensive school-community food system in Prince Rupert
- **Sik-E-Dakh Meat Processing Facility:** a meat processing facility in Sik-E-Dakh

The initiatives were located in Prince George, Fraser Lake, Prince Rupert, Sik-E-Dakh, and Fort St. John, with the Northern Routes Food Network engaging with Northeast communities stretching from Prince George to Fort Nelson (see **Map 3**). This geographic spread ensured that investment reached communities from urban centres to remote and Indigenous communities, covering all regions across Northern BC, reflecting the project's commitment to equity and regional resilience.

Across the seven funded initiatives, Greenchain's support helped translate strong community missions into financially grounded, operationally sound models. Sustainability planning summaries for each initiative are in **Appendix M.**



Map 3: Large-Scale's Initiatives Geographical Location.
See full map here: https://cfsd-phabc.ca/large-scale/#map

North Coast Food Hub | Planting the Seeds for Food Sustainability, Security & Sovereignty in the North

Traditional Territory of the Ts'msyen Nation (Prince Rupert)

This initiative is led by Ecotrust Canada and School District 52, in partnership with the Gitmaxmak'ay Nisga'a Society and the Metlakatla Development Corporation, to establish and expand elements of a school-community food network. The network has gardens at four school sites, community and K-12 curriculum education programs, regional distribution networks, and local seafood production and distribution initiatives aimed at strengthening food security and sovereignty in Prince Rupert and nearby communities. With the funding and the sustainability support received, infrastructure for greenhouse and seafood processing has been built on school properties.

This capital investment is paired with multiple revenue channels driven by local demand across Prince Rupert, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the initiative. The food produced supports the School District 52 meal programs and benefits students, families, and community members. The initiative also fosters many local and regional partnerships and is gaining momentum towards developing a North Coast Food Hub, which exploring the feasibility of a large-scale composting and soil building for the region, developing a community food market for year-round local sales, and securing fresh salmon for all schools in SD52 meal programs.



Photo: North Coast Food Hub - Planting the Seeds for Food Sustainability, Security & Sovereignty in the North.



Photo: The Food Forest Initiative.

The Food Forest Initiative

Traditional Territory of the Ts'msyen Nation (Prince Rupert)

This initiative is led by the Ts'msyen Culture Society (TCS) to develop a native plant nursery, focusing on growing Moolks (Pacific Crab Apples), with a long-term goal of food sovereignty and community revival. In fall 2025, TCS started harvesting Moolk's seeds and propagating hardwood stem cuttings. With the funding and sustainability support received, an experienced farm manager was recruited, and essential infrastructure and land preparation were put in place, laying the foundation for a diversified revenue model built on plant sales and community partnerships to support the nursery's long-term sustainability.

The society plans to distribute native plants to Metlakatla, Lax Kw'alaams, Harley Bay, Gitxaala, Kitsumkalum, and Kitselas, and provide plants to residents in urban centres, schools, and local service groups. These plants aim to boost local food security and offer reliable, healthy access to nutritious food and cultural materials for all community members. TCS regularly hosts engagement sessions to inform the initiative and create a platform for community feedback, ideas, and concerns.

Sik-E-Dakh Meat Processing and Wrapping Facility

Sik-Eh-Dakh (Glen Vowell), Gitxsan, Lax Yip

This initiative is led by the Sik-E-Dakh First Nation to develop a meat-processing and wrapping facility that enhances local food sovereignty by providing accessible, affordable infrastructure for wild and domestic meat processing. Serving Sik-E-Dakh, neighbouring Gitxsan communities, and regional farmers, the initiative combined traditional Gitxsan preservation practices with modern processing techniques to create jobs, training opportunities, and sustainable food systems.

This initiative invested in a community mobile abattoir unit and a commercial meat processing facility equipped with items like cold storage, commercial-grade meat cutting, slicing, and processing equipment, along with packing, preservation, canning equipment, and a large smoker. Grounded in a phased financial plan and the use of local leadership and part-time regional labour, the facility is structured to remain low-cost and accessible for the community from the outset, while building toward long-term operational sustainability.

The facility has opened opportunities for the community to participate in traditional teachings and meat processing training, now producing products such as sausages, moose and bison jerky. With the facility operational, there is now a dedicated space for processing hunted and fished meats, and the Sik-E-Dakh School Farm and community members are boosting animal production, including chickens, pigs, and the investment in raising cattle.



Photo: Sik-E-Dakh Meat Processing and Wrapping Facility.

Fraser Lake Elementary and Secondary School Farm (FLESS)

Traditional Territories of the Stellat'en First Nation and Nadleh Whut'en (Fraser Lake)

This initiative is led by School District 91 and the Fraser Lake Elementary and Secondary School. The FLESS school-community farm provides the essential space, environment, and infrastructure for local food production, food education, and intergenerational knowledge sharing in Fraser Lake. It serves as a space to enhance food security and food sovereignty within the school community, expand training and employment opportunities for students and community members, and advance food systems in the North.

The farm has established a one-acre school-community site with a nursery, in-ground food plots, a year-round 100-foot geothermal greenhouse, raised garden beds, Indigenous gardens, and an orchard. It also features professional-grade equipment and tools for growing, harvesting, and cleaning food, which are available for use by the school, students, and community. Sustainability planning for the farm built a strong network of local partnerships and combined grant-funded infrastructure, including the greenhouse, with no-cost use of school district land, substantially lowering the revenue threshold needed to sustain operations. The farm is integrated into FLESS education as an outdoor classroom, incorporating curriculum elements and credit-bearing courses for high school students. Food produced on the farm supplies FLESS meal programs, with surplus produce distributed to regional schools and the community, while community garden plots serve local residents and food service organizations.



Photo: Fraser Lake Elementary and Secondary School Farm (FLESS).

Prince George Community Kitchen

Traditional Territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation (Prince George)

This initiative is led by the Prince George Salvation Army, which has developed a community kitchen that is a budget-friendly resource for the community to access a health-accredited, and inspected by a health authority, commercial kitchen for their cooking, food processing and baking needs. The kitchen will prioritize providing food access organizations a shared space to prepare, process, distribute, and store food—improving access to nutritious meals for vulnerable and equity-deserving populations. The space will also be available to the general public and small food businesses at an affordable rate, supporting local food security and economic growth.

Sustainability planning for the kitchen helped establish a steering committee combining Salvation Army representatives and community members, to help develop and operate the kitchen for the community. It also helped develop a balanced revenue model of user fees, program funding, and partnerships to keep access affordable while maintaining financial stability. The community kitchen aims to reduce food waste, enhance distribution efficiency, and create opportunities for food literacy and skills training.

It will strengthen Prince George's food system, foster community resilience, and develop a sustainable social enterprise model that ensures long-term food security across Northern BC.



Photo: Prince George Community Kitchen.

Northern Routes Food Network

Traditional Treaty 8 Territory

This initiative is led by the Peace Region Farmers Institute in partnership with the Prince George Salvation Army, the Fort St. John Salvation Army and BC Bus North. The Northern Routes Food Network is enhancing food security in northeastern BC by overcoming distribution challenges. The initiative supports rural and remote communities by partnering with BC Bus North, while exploring additional partners for growth and expansion, to transport nutritious, rescued, and locally produced food efficiently and affordably among food equity organizations in the northeast.

This decentralized food distribution network uses existing BC Bus North routes to provide equitable access to food, promote Indigenous food sovereignty, and encourage local food production. Sustainability planning ensured that distribution costs were exceptionally low, moving food hundreds of kilometres for approximately $10 per tote, while using existing warehouse space and delivery systems at the Salvation Army in Prince George to avoid major capital investment. Looking ahead, the Prince George Salvation Army's commercial kitchen is also envisioned as a shared resource for other local NGOs addressing food insecurity can access kitchen space to meet urgent food needs, guided by a community advisory committee to oversee and steward its use. By addressing barriers such as limited infrastructure, high poverty levels, rising food costs, and low population density, the network reduces costs, guarantees affordable food for vulnerable groups, and supplies locally produced food for the region. It also fosters collaboration among food access groups, producers, and community leaders. This scalable, sustainable model creates a more resilient, community-focused food economy in the north and beyond.



Photo: Northern Routes Food Network.

UNBC Food Security Initiative

Traditional Territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation (Prince George)

This initiative is a diverse campus food security investment, including the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII), Prince George Public Interest Research Group, UNBC Northern Undergraduate Student Society (NUGSS), Northern British Columbia Graduate Students' Society (NBCGSS), the UNBC Food Research Hub, and the Northern Women's Centre. This initiative aimed to enhance collaboration and innovation within campus food systems by funding six UNBC food security initiatives.

Together, these initiatives strengthened campus food storage infrastructure; expanded campus–community partnerships, collaborations, and volunteer engagement; improved food access and distribution models (including food banks, open-access pantries, food boxes, a dry goods store, and a community garden); delivered food literacy workshops and food-focused gatherings; increased the cultural relevance and quantity of food choices; and, enhanced communications and promotion of food security programs and projects.

The initiatives include:

a. Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII)

This initiative enhanced the reach, coordination, and institutional capacity of existing programs by supporting the First Nations Centre Student Food Program, monthly potlucks, the Campus Cousins (Indigenous student-led) program, and OII Community Connections events, which were strengthened for the remainder of the 2025-26 academic year. It also supported pre-planning activities for strategic initiatives scheduled for the 2026-27 academic year.



Photo: Office of Indigenous Initiatives.



Photo: Prince George Public Interest Research Group.

b. Prince George Public Interest Research Group (PGPIRG)

This initiative supported PGPIRG in advancing their food security programs, including The Good Food Box, the Good Store, and their student-community food production gardens. Staffing capacity was increased to develop a coordinated food security strategic plan, design and launch a new student and community Good Food Box program, and improve the existing Good Store and gardens.

Sustainability planning combined upfront grant funding with a lean operating model, drawing on existing campus space and volunteer support to keep overhead low while building a pathway toward cost recovery through Good Food Box sales and steady participation growth.The initiative also facilitated the purchase of equipment, tools, and infrastructure to support programming, including upgrades and expansions to their student-community garden plots.

c. UNBC Northern Undergraduate Student Society (NUGSS)

The initiative involved purchasing a new stand-up freezer for the Food Bank, which significantly increased its frozen-bread storage capacity, enabling it to accept more frozen food items. In addition, NUGSS invested in a fridge for the common lounge, transforming it into a community fridge with storage bins for personal food items. The funding also facilitated the development of new signage, procedures, and social media materials to effectively communicate this initiative and food bank operations to the student body and the UNBC community.



Photo: UNBC Northern Undergraduate Student Society.

d. Northern British Columbia Graduate Students' Society (NBCGSS)

This initiative installed a commercial freezer for NBCGSS's Food Bank Program, enabling the Food Bank to safely store food within a quality infrastructure that ensures the program's long-term sustainability. This investment increased the food bank's capacity to accept larger quantities of donations and helped them provide more culturally relevant foods to students at UNBC, which can otherwise be difficult for students on campus to access.

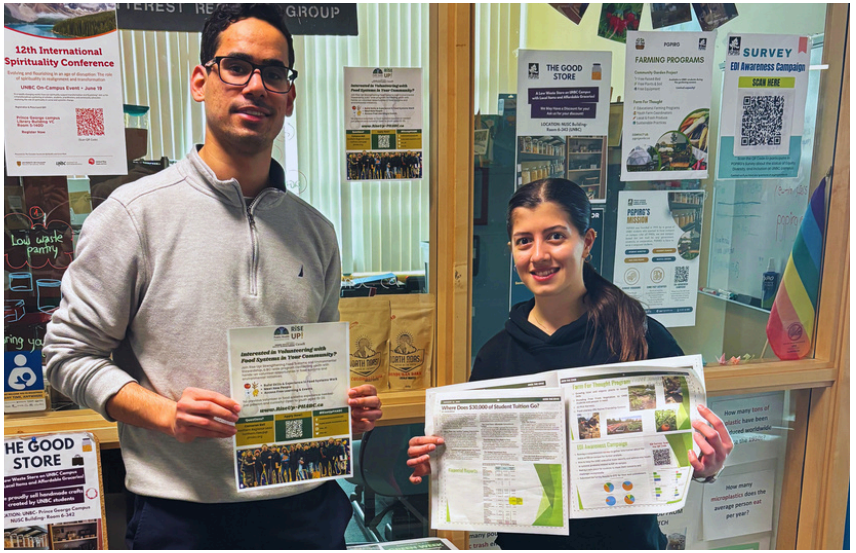


Photo: Northern British Columbia Graduate Students' Society.

e. UNBC Food Research Hub

This initiative hired a communications assistant and began developing a website to showcase the Hub's vision, goals, team members, research projects, partners, funding opportunities, resources, and community initiatives across Northern BC. Core pages have been developed, and content is being curated in collaboration with faculty and community partners to ensure it is inclusive and reflects diverse perspectives. As the website becomes fully operational, it will significantly enhance visibility and strengthen communication and collaboration in support of resilient food systems in Northern BC.



Photo: UNBC Food Research Hub.

f. Northern Women's Centre

This initiative shifted the Northern Women's Centre's food access from a charity-based model to a community-led, relationship-centred system. It developed workshops focused on growing food, reducing food waste, and using foods that are culturally and environmentally safe and sustainable; offered monthly mini–food boxes; and created a shared platform where students, volunteers, and community partners can work together to source, distribute, and openly discuss food.



Photo: Northern Women's Centre logo.

Mid-term Report

For midterm reporting, Large-Scale Innovation funding recipients were asked to submit key updates, progress and photos that were used to create posters for the 2025 Fall Northern Harvest Food Summit. Recipients were also invited to present their posters and contribute to creating a collective space for initiatives to highlight their work and strengthen connections across the broader northern food systems network.

The posters of each initiative were examined through a two-stage inductive analysis. An AI-assisted qualitative analysis tool was used to generate initial codes and preliminary themes which the report-writing team then reviewed, refined, and validated these themes to ensure accuracy, clarity, and alignment with cluster-related ideas, resulting in three overarching themes: land-rooted food sovereignty, building capacity and shared infrastructure, and intergenerational learning and engagement.

Land-Rooted Food Sovereignty

Some initiatives grounded their work in local territories, cultural relationships to land, and community-defined priorities. The Food Forest Initiative and Planting the Seeds initiative explicitly centre Ts'msyen and Nisga'a food systems, traditional species, and language, while Sik-E-Dakh integrates Gitxsan preservation methods with modern processing. The FLESS School Farm is investing in long-term community food security through school community food literacy and production, reaching beyond students to include the neighbouring community. The Community Kitchen and Northern Routes emphasize intentional efforts to create locally appropriate, culturally relevant food access.

Building Capacity and Shared Infrastructure

Greenhouses, farms, a meat facility, a community kitchen, and a regional transport network were levers for systems change rather than one-off initiatives. Northern Routes developed a low-barrier regional logistics network; the Salvation Army formalized a community advisory committee with local agencies; Sik-E-Dakh built a meant facility that created jobs and skills pathways. Collectively, these initiatives emphasize that durable infrastructure, governance, and training are central to transforming the northern food system.

Intergenerational Learning and Engagement

The initiatives all highlight stories of people engaging with food systems in new ways—students checking on garden beds daily, community members proud to process meat locally, and partners energized by successes in regional distribution.

FLESS and the Planting the Seed for Food Sustainability initiatives focused on K–12 learners, linking curriculum with food literacy. The Food Forest Initiative planned to engage youth in culturally rooted jobs, while Sik-E-Dakh emphasized intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The mid-term reports for the Large-Scale's initiatives reveal a coherent story of how communities across Northern BC are transforming their food systems. Together, they show initiatives moving beyond one-size-fits-all or short-term responses toward deeply rooted, relationship-based change. Each initiative is firmly anchored, with some led by and in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

The mid-term reports also highlight growing intergenerational engagement and excitement—from children in school gardens to Elders guiding traditional practices, and community members co-designing new facilities and networks.





Photos: Fraser Lake Elementary School.



Photo: The Rustic Market Garden.

Final Report

The final report was conducted through a survey that primarily collected quantitative data on initiative activities, participation, and outcomes. Grantees completed a 45-minute online survey (see **Appendix I**) through *Hosted in Canada Surveys,* sharing mostly quantitative details about their activities and results with the option to submit their responses via email or through a one-on-one Zoom interview with two PHABC staff members.

All the Large-Scale's initiatives shared a "Most Significant Transformation Story" describing the most meaningful change from their work (see **Appendix J),** pairing measurable outcomes with narratives to illustrate their broader impact. Note that while seven initiatives were funded, UNBC Food Security comprises five distinct sub-initiatives, each of which submitted its own survey and MST story, so the results below reflect 11 responses rather than seven.

To analyze the final report, we began with a thematic analysis of the Most Significant Transformation (MST) stories and reviewed the data to refine and confirm emerging patterns.

We complemented this with a closed-ended analysis of the survey data summarized through variables, with simple counts and percentages, and wove these quantitative patterns together with qualitative examples from the MST stories and open-ended responses.

This combined approach captures both the scale of change across the seven initiatives and the lived experience behind it. Six key themes were identified: from isolation to connection and belonging; from charity to community-driven models; from limited capacity to strong skills and leadership; from fragmented efforts to strengthening networks and systems; from exclusion to equity and inclusion; and moving from short-term relief to long-term food systems transformation.

Across all Large-Scale's initiatives, the work represents a substantial material and relational shift in northern food systems: initiatives grew, harvested, or hunted an estimated 17,771 pounds of food and distributed roughly 32,875 pounds, facilitating about 1,622 meals and reaching approximately 1,810 people through emergency food support (see **Table 8**). The themes below trace how this material impact translated into shifts in relationships, capacity, and systems across Northern BC.

Table 8: Summary of Large-Scale food production and distribution impact

Metric	Estimated Total
Food grown, harvested, or hunted	**17,771 lbs**
Food distributed	**32,875 lbs**
Meals facilitated	**1,622**
People reached through emergency food support	**1,810**

> **The most meaningful shift has been moving from isolated projects to a more coordinated, systems-based approach to food systems.** Even at this early stage, we are building a stronger regional network grounded in partnership and shared purpose, with a long-term goal of strengthening food systems, increasing community capacity, and improving our ability to respond to climate-related challenges.
> *- UNBC Food Research Hub.*

1. From Isolation to Connection and Belonging

The Large-Scale's initiatives directly reached an estimated 3,018 people and benefited another estimated 4,055 indirectly, connecting many more community members to shared spaces and supports rather than navigating food insecurity alone. School farms, community gardens, community kitchens, food banks, and hubs function as gathering grounds where students, Elders, volunteers, producers, and organizations meet, learn, and act together.

Grantees also reported gains in the capacity behind this relational work: 75% of grantees reported creating stronger collaborative relationships, 75% improved community outreach and support, and 75% reported gains in infrastructure and equipment. In 67% of the initiatives, staff and volunteer capacity increased, and 58% improved their knowledge of food systems transformation and access to additional funding.

2. From Charity to Community-Driven Models

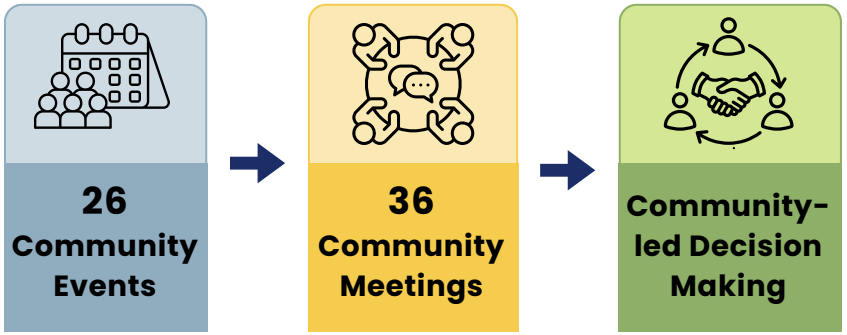
The MST stories described a clear movement away from one-directional "charity" toward models where those most affected by food insecurity co-create solutions. Across the initiatives, 26 community events and 36 community meetings were held, and 83% of initiatives reported having community members directly involved in decision-making (see **Figure 10**).

Gardens, food hubs, meat processing facilities, food banks, and kitchens became spaces where community members, students, and Elders planned, grew, processed, and distributed food themselves, often through advisory committees and boards that included Indigenous Nations, farmers, youth, and local organizations.

Initiatives embedded JEDI-aligned practices, including low-barrier, stigma-free access; culturally relevant foods and languages; and inclusive governance structures, and used ongoing engagement, from Symposi-Yum and kitchen grand openings to school gardening workshops, to stay responsive to community priorities.

> **Harvest Hands is aiming to transform (...) food access from a charity-based model to a community-led, relationship-centred system.** (...) Participants will no longer be passive recipients; they will become contributors, educators, and connectors. Students will gain confidence organizing workshops, volunteers will develop leadership and coordination skills, and community partners will share lived knowledge that shapes programming in meaningful ways.
> *- Northern Women's Centre.*

Figure 10: Building community-driven decision making



> **Beyond infrastructure, the project supports Indigenous leadership, workforce development, and intergenerational learning.** Community members are gaining hands-on experience in meat handling, cutting, and food safety, building skills that support long-term employment and economic self-reliance.
> *-Sik-E-Dakh Meat Processing and Wrapping Facility.*

3. From Limited Capacity to Strong Skills and Leadership

Almost every MST story emphasized practical skills, organizational strength, and leadership development. Across the initiatives, 16 full-time-equivalent and 42 volunteer roles were created, and volunteers contributed an estimated 4,530 hours.

Initiatives held 30 workshops, along with additional training and demonstrations on meat handling, food safety, food processing, and home cooking (such as Instant Pot sessions), giving participants concrete skills they can carry into daily life and future employment. Initiatives' leads also shared learning through the Northern Food Summit, mentorship, and collaboration with regional partners, extending capacity-building beyond individual sites. Still, 58% of the initiatives cited reliance on volunteers and limited staff as ongoing challenges.

4. From Fragmented Efforts to Strengthened Networks and Systems

Initiatives moved from operating in silos to interconnected networks with shared infrastructure, processes, and vision. They reported at least 63 new or strengthened partnerships, an average of five per initiative, with strong representation from Indigenous communities, non-profits, schools, food banks, youth groups, local governments, and businesses. Regional networks and hubs, such as the Northern Routes Food Network and the UNBC Food Research Hub, created new opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and coordination among food security organizations.

Distribution networks expanded to connect farms, food banks, schools, and community organizations. Shared community kitchens and processing facilities served as central hubs for aggregating and distributing food. Eighty-three percent of initiatives reported participating in coordinated food distribution networks, ranging from Northern Routes' coordination of BC Bus North shipments to and from regional hubs, to the Symposi-Yum event under the North Coast Food Hub, expanded NBCGSS food bank distribution through Salvation Army allocations, and Sik-E-Dakh's emerging plan to share locally harvested meat with households and Elders. Many initiatives emphasized that strong collaborations with schools, Indigenous partners, local governments, and community groups were essential for building trust and scaling impact.

> This initiative has strengthened connections across the community. We hosted our first SymposiYum in September 2025 to introduce the project, and we're now planning a weekly community market running from June to September at a local school. **Partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and the City of Prince Rupert have grown, helping align local food initiatives with broader community goals.**
> *- North Coast Food Hub.*

5. From Exclusion to Equity and Inclusion

Initiatives made a deliberate effort to center Indigenous voices and local food. Across the Large-Scale's initiatives, 91% supported First Nation communities; 50% supported Métis; 23% supported Inuit; and 58% worked with urban or non-affiliated Indigenous people. One-third engaged Indigenous partners in leadership, governance, or decision-making roles, 58% in consultative roles, and 25% in shared leadership, while 33% provided capacity building around traditional foods and practices, and 33% supported Indigenous-owned food businesses.

Many initiatives cultivated culturally relevant plants and foods, strengthened systems for harvesting and processing locally hunted or raised foods, and integrated language, such as The Food Forest Initiative's use of the Sm'algyax language, and Indigenous knowledge into gardens, food forests, and school programs. Overall, 67% of initiatives identified Indigenous peoples as beneficiaries or participants. Beyond Indigenous engagement, initiatives prioritized other populations facing barriers to food security, including families experiencing food insecurity (9 initiatives), low-income community members (8), children and youth under 18 (6), newcomers or immigrants (5), people living with disabilities (5), visible minorities (4), and 2SLGBTQI+ communities (3). Sixty-seven percent of initiatives also intentionally increased access to culturally relevant foods, such as the Food Forest's work with berries, medicinal plants, and local meats, the North Coast fish processing kitchen, and the UNBC Food Bank's halal, vegan, and allergen-aware options through its new cold storage infrastructure.

> "The main goal is to revitalize Ts'msyen food systems and increase the amount of community members harvesting safely on the territory and the amount of traditional food consumed. (...) **This is a long-term vision for food sovereignty, as many of these plants take 3+ years to establish and produce fruit, but will provide a stable, long-term, nutritious food source.**
> *- Ts'msyen Culture Society*

> FLESS Farm is not just growing produce but is actively nurturing the long-term food sovereignty and security of the community (...) The Farm is also **a seed of inspiration to other schools within School District 91, and the north, to vision the opportunity of a school-community farm model.**
> *-Fraser Lake School Farm*

6. From Short-Term Relief to Long-Term Food Systems Transformation

All initiatives reported that their work will continue beyond the grant period, and 75% leveraged additional funding totalling approximately $806,400. Infrastructure investments, such as greenhouses, freezers, kitchens, and distribution systems, are designed as durable assets that significantly expand long-term capacity.

At least a quarter of initiatives reported influencing organizational or systemic policy through internal food security strategies, evidence generation for future advocacy, or raising awareness among local governments and institutions. Food boxes, meals, and distributions remain important, but initiatives increasingly paired with education, governance shifts, and infrastructure to address root causes and reframe food work as community-led, collaborative, and strategic.

The Large-Scale's initiatives are driving shared, system-level shifts in Northern BC food systems (see **Figure 11**). The transformation pathways, based on the six themes above, highlight emerging and ongoing changes that continue to evolve as initiatives grow and adapt.

Figure 11: Large-Scale six transformation pathways

Theme	Transformation		Impact
Connection	**Isolated** Food insecurity experienced alone	**Belonging** Shared community spaces and solidarity	**75%** of initiatives improved community outreach and support
Power	**Charitable** One-direction service models	**Community-led** Shared governance and agency	**83%** of initiatives formed community-led decision-making
Capacity	**Developing** Early skills and operational capacity	**Strengthened** Practical skills and leadership	**16** full-time jobs created
Systems	**Fragmented** Disconnected efforts and infrastructure	**Coordinated** Shared systems and collaboration	**63** new or strengthened partnerships
Indigenous Leadership	**Peripheral** Outside core decision-making	**Grounded** Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and land	**75%** of initiatives engaged Indigenous communities
Timeframe	**Short-term** Emergency relief focus	**Transformative** Long-term systems change	**100%** of initiatives continuing beyond grant funding

Key Learnings

The Large-Scale Innovations funding streams delivered by PHABC and FBBC in Northern BC offered a rare and meaningful opportunity to test, learn, and refine what relationship-based, equity-focused food systems funding can look like in practice. The insights affirm the value of the funding's core design principles and point toward how future iterations can continue to centre equity, cultural relevance, and community-driven approaches.

A foundational learning was the critical role of the pre-implementation planning period. Sustained, relationship-driven engagement before funding, including targeted outreach, site visits, and collaboration with partners such as Northern Health, First Nations Health Authority, and New Relationship Trust, built the trust and readiness initiatives needed to take root.

This directly supported the project's low-barrier design objective, demonstrating that meaningful systems change requires time and investment in relationships before visible results can emerge.



Photo: Salvation Army Prince George staff preparing to pack food for Northern Routes Food Network.

Investments in shared physical infrastructure, such as commercial freezers, community kitchens, food transportation systems, and school farms, serve as lasting community assets that extend well beyond the funding period. However, infrastructure alone was not enough: many initiatives relied heavily on volunteer labour or limited staffing, which constrained growth. Future funding designs could pair infrastructure funding with dedicated support for training, leadership development, and equitable compensation to ensure that communities have the capacity to sustain what has been built.

Business and financial sustainability planning showed what helps initiatives succeed over the long term. While each initiative was unique, the most successful ones shared a few things in common: careful planning, strong leadership, and a clear fit between community needs and how the initiative was run. Having a clear mission and target population helped guide decisions along the way, and clear market research kept plans grounded in actual demand and operational realities.

Successful initiatives also kept their operations right-sized to community needs, rather than overbuilding, and leveraged existing infrastructure and resources, such as school properties and regional transportation networks to keep costs down. Experienced initiative managers were key to balancing strategy with day-to-day delivery, and building partnerships early helped establish credibility. Large-Scale funding gave initiatives the breathing room to pilot and refine their models without immediate financial pressure, supported by business plans grounded in realistic assumptions about revenue, cost, and growth. Applying lessons from similar initiatives and earning genuine community buy-in also proved critical to reducing risk and keeping people engaged over time.

Events such as the Northern Harvest Food Summit helped knit together a regional network, modelling the kind of collective action the funding stream set out to advance. Future funding opportunities could embed structured peer-learning and network-building components from the outset, rather than leaving them to emerge organically.

Further, initiatives rooted in Indigenous knowledge and practices require flexibility in program design to honour the interconnection of cultural revitalization, food sovereignty, and systems change. Reducing administrative barriers and enabling adaptability for Indigenous-led initiatives emerged as a consistent priority.

These insights align with PHABC's broader commitment to shifting away from traditional granting models and will inform how future programs are structured to better serve equity-deserving and Indigenous-led organizations.

Looking ahead, participating organizations identified continued funding, supportive policy environments, stronger partnerships, and sustained network collaboration as the key conditions needed to scale and sustain this work. These are not simply the needs of individual initiatives; they are the conditions for a northern food systems movement. The Large-Scale Innovations funding stream has cultivated not just food and infrastructure but also the trust, leadership, and collaborative energy needed for enduring transformation and offering both a model and momentum for what comes next.

Photo: Fraser Lake Elementary School.



Special Thanks

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