



Justice, Equity, Decolonial Practices, and Inclusion in Food Systems Change Training Workshop

Collaborating Organizations

Royal Roads University
Ecotrust Canada

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROJECT BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

This document reports on a Justice, Equity, Decolonizing Practices, and Inclusion (JEDI) workshop held in Prince Rupert, British Columbia (BC), the unceded territories of Tsimshian First Nations (Kitselas, Kitsumkalum, Metlakatla, Gitga'at, Kitasoo/Xaixais). In Prince Rupert and beyond, several environmental (e.g., flooding, wildfires) and socioeconomic (e.g., pandemic, inflation) shocks have impacted food supply chains with cascading impacts to food access, security, and sovereignty. These impacts are unequally distributed across a given locale. Historically (and currently) marginalised groups are disproportionately impacted and experience inequities in food, health, income, labour, and representation in decision-making spaces. Local communities across BC have expressed interest in integrating and centering social justice and decolonial practices in food systems planning and (re)development but are unsure of how to get started, what gaps exist, and where to orient their time and effort (Topley et al., 2022).

To address these food system inequities and these capacity (skills, knowledge, resources) challenges, a community-based participatory action research project was initiated to support communities to centre justice in food planning and interventions. In May 2022, Royal Roads University (RRU) and the Public Health Association of BC (PHABC), in collaboration with Ecotrust Canada, started the Reimagining Food Systems project (see Appendix A for a description of the project history and context).

The project aims to:

1. Build community capacity to integrate justice into food system interventions and efforts in Prince Rupert, BC.
2. Develop planning and policy tools that can support local efforts (e.g., food justice planning tool, food system evaluation framework).

The first phase of this project aimed to contextualise and create a shared language across non-profit organisations, local government (e.g., municipal, regional, health authority, school district), and other food actors (e.g., farmers, food retailers). To this end, a Justice, Equity, Decolonial Practices, and Inclusion (JEDI) workshop and subsequent coaching sessions were delivered to community members and stakeholders.

The project team (RRU, PHABC, Ecotrust Canada) designed this workshop with the goals of:

1. Building a shared language and understanding of key terms found within social justice and decolonizing food systems knowledge systems.
2. Establishing connections across Prince Rupert to begin the task of relational accountability.
3. Building community capacity for staying with the difficulties, discomforts, complexities and uncertainties that inevitably emerge when doing JEDI work, without becoming overwhelmed or seeking quick solutions.
4. Building a foundation that can dismantle and rebuild food systems (and beyond).

The JEDI workshop was held on January 18th, 2023, from 9am to 12pm, at the Coastal Business Resource Center in Prince Rupert, BC. There were a total of ten participants from non-profit organisations, provincial and local government staff, and educational organisations (college and school district) (see Appendix B for attendee organisations). The absence of stakeholders with insights into food production, distribution, processing, retail, and public health are noted and warrant follow-up engagement.

The workshop began with an introduction and welcome from Celine Trojand at Ecotrust Canada. Workshop activities were facilitated by the project team. The workshop began with the facilitators introducing the agenda (Appendix C) and the project's purpose and background (Appendix A).

JEDI TERMINOLOGY & WORKSHOP RESPONSES

A [JEDI primer video](#) and resources (Appendix D) were shared with participants prior to the workshop to define common terminology. These terms are included here for reference, and can be shared with others who were unable to attend the workshop or might have an interest in participating in the project at a later date.

Justice

During the workshop, participants identified similar terms to justice such as accountability, respect, fairness, and responsibility. These terms are noted to be relational ones. That is, accountability is not just unidirectional, or individual. Rather, responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity are collective and shared. Justice can be categorised in three interconnected dimensions: recognitional, procedural, and distributional.

Recognitional justice comes from the injustice of making people and experiences the same or assuming that they are universal. However, reality is shaped by difference and to deny, minimise, and silence these differences in the pursuit of universal norms is a great injustice. Examples of universal statements include: 'If hungry people were educated they would know how to budget and cook food'; or, 'free food from food banks should only be provided to those who can prove their need'; or, 'adequate income, earned from wage labour, will end hunger.' Recognitional justice centres differences by acknowledging the different experiences, and inequities that people and social groups face (e.g., race, culture, gender, and ability-level).

Participants in the workshop identified the importance of varied perspectives on solutions, practices, and issues facing different people across a region. Within food systems, people and groups have different values, experiences, and knowledge systems that inform food practices and meanings. This implies the existence of multiple food practices; yet, the Canadian food system is largely reflective of White, Euro-centric cultural norms and practices. Common generalisations such as 'growing, preparing and consuming local foods is healthy and nutritious' provide an example of this. It is important to consider: whose values are being normalised or oppressed, and what can be done to recognize actions that uphold and/or challenge these norms?

JEDI TERMINOLOGY & WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Procedural justice can be understood as both the right to participate in established/dominant decision-making processes and the right to build a governance system for self-governance. This dimension of justice relates to recognitional justice by embedding procedures into food systems planning that can help to ensure certain forms of knowledge and values are not privileged over others. Fair and equitable opportunities are needed for people to participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them. Progress toward procedural justice requires colonial institutions to acknowledge, examine, and address structural challenges to decision-making, including unfair power relations, capacity disparities, and barriers to participation. Food systems planning and engagement processes must move beyond tokenistic participation to re-distribute power among communities and their members (see below on Inclusion).

Distributional justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of goods, materials, and services, such as the fair/equal distribution of food, privately held farmland properties, and decision-making power across a community. This dimension includes the distribution of both benefits and (importantly) burdens/harms (e.g., exposure to pesticides, obesity, malnutrition, hunger). The distributional dimension of justice is linked to the recognitional and procedural dimensions (described before). For example, the decision-making processes that allocate resources for a farmers' market directed towards wealthy consumers can result in an inequitable distribution of benefits (e.g., health of higher income people) and harms (e.g., lack of access for low/fixed income people).

Equity

'Equity' can be confused with 'equality'; however, there are key differences between the concepts. Equality refers to treating people within a community or locale in the same way. It is linked to the idea of meritocracy, the assumption that people achieve life outcomes in a way that can be based on their level of effort. This wrongly assumes that the 'starting line' for all people is the same and fails to recognize that barriers to achievement occur due to systemic barriers (e.g., racial discrimination, intergenerational poverty, trauma) that hinder full participation in society. Figure 1 represents equality as identical boxes for looking over a fence being allocated to each individual. However, the foundation is unequal (the ground) and the barriers that each faces to full participation are also unequal (the fence).

JEDI TERMINOLOGY & WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Conversely, the term 'Equity' means treating individuals "according to their circumstances" so that they can experience similar outcomes to the rest of the community or system. Embedding equity requires allocation of resources, support/care, and power, with due consideration of actors' different circumstances, experiences, and contexts as opposed to a universal approach that at surface appears equal. In the image, equity is represented through the allocation of different boxes to different individuals that serve to address the unequal foundation and the unequal barriers.



EQUALITY



EQUITY

Figure 1: Distinguishing between Equality and Equity.

In addition to the images displayed in Figure 1, an image of a dismantled fence was shown, and some participants noted this felt uncomfortable, finding an image of the fence being destroyed unsettling. Others note that the nature of the 'fences' are invisible and they are difficult to perceive. This is an important point that links to recognitional and procedural dimensions of justice. The recognition that one's own experiences are not universal and that accommodations for including people in planning and decision-making processes with different lived experiences are necessary.

Decolonial Practices

Colonialism must be understood as an ongoing process that creates the underlying values and beliefs that inform Canadian culture. The term settler colonialism is used to describe how (Indigenous) people were violently removed from their territories by European colonists. This also involved the assimilation of Indigenous (and other non-European descent) peoples' cultures to a dominant Eurocentric and White culture. Settler colonialism is about the ongoing displacement of peoples to colonists who then declare that land to be their home. It includes the pursuit of land, the exploitation of labour, erasure of culture, and the extraction of resources.

A key tenet of settler colonialism is the idea that land, labour, ideas, and resources can be made into property (and embedded in legal and cultural norms). In Canada, it has also meant the theft of people from their homelands (Indigenous, African, Asian peoples) to become property of settlers and made to labour on stolen land (Canadian Museum of Human Rights, 2023). To maintain the status quo and this unequal power dynamic, it also involved the assimilation of Indigenous (and other non-European descent) peoples' cultures to a dominant Eurocentric and White culture. This includes the categorization of Indigenous people via the Indian Act (status) and the idea of blood quantum.

Decolonial Practices can be defined as:

“The bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power and restoring of colonized (e.g., Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples) world views, cultures, traditions, and knowledge” (Smith, 2012)

Enacting decolonial practices means first recognizing an imposed hierarchy that seeks to assimilate different ways of being, thinking, and doing. Under a colonial worldview, individualistic thinking and self-awareness are hierarchically positioned as more important than sensing, feeling the world and building relationships of respect, reciprocity and accountability to non-human beings (e.g., plants, animals, land, sky, planet). Once recognition is possible, then people, communities, and institutions should take active steps to dismantle these systems.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion often refers to creating an environment where everyone is welcome and valued (link to procedural and recognitional forms of justice). Inclusive spaces can only be made when time and effort are put towards identifying and addressing unconscious biases and assumptions (see below). Equitable and just participation is needed in activities that have an impact on the daily lives of community members, particularly those that are facing an unequal share of the burdens and are not receiving the benefits. For example, having control over decision-making, identification of issues and root causes, and identifying and implementing solutions that maintain the dignity, autonomy of people and communities.

Inclusion can shape food futures. Negative impacts can happen for those that are excluded from processes or those that are included but in ways that do not provide any actual authority or power to influence or have control (manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation). Citizen control over food systems means having the ability to create one's own table to identify the issues, to delegate to those that have authority and privilege, and to have multiple partnerships with other tables and groups.

Non-participation in planning occurs in many ways, including when 'manipulation' and 'therapy' approaches are used. Such approaches involve participants or community members being guided or coerced towards agreement (manipulation) or are seen as problems to be fixed and brought to the viewpoint of the dominant group/individual (therapy). The late planning and policy expert, Sherry Arnstein (1969), describes the true objective of these approaches as "not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants" (p.217)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A central idea, and area of action, in the Reimagining Food Systems project is that more activities and interventions under the 'business-as-usual' paradigm are not going to end food system inequities nor prepare communities for resilient food futures. The 'problem' lies deep in our collective conditioning as Settler colonial peoples with unexamined roots in Eurocentric and White cultural dimensions. For example, the Identifying and Countering White Supremacy in Food System report describes narratives (neoliberalism, individualism, paternalism, and universalism) that reproduce food system inequities (Conrad, 2020). A common example of universalism is assuming that people lack education on, or knowledge of, healthy food (e.g. nutrition labels and science) and food budgeting, which is why they are hungry, malnourished, and unable to afford food. Another example of paternalism is policing 'need' of food bank users through means/income tests or other administrative barriers (e.g. photo ID, address).

Similar work by decolonizing education scholars, the House of Modernity (Stein et al., 2017) is used as a metaphor to describe the harmful narratives of a Modern/Colonial person, organisation, or community (Figure 2). The House is meant to symbolise our current society that is crumbling as these dimensions (academic knowledge, global capitalism, governance through the nation-state, and a foundation of separability), and solutions generated from them, continue to cause harm and challenges.

“While contemporary crises are often perceived to derive from external threats to the house, we argue that in fact these crises are a product of the violent and unsustainable practices that are required in order to build and sustain the house itself.” (Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective, 2017)

The Role of Emotions and Relationships

People, communities, and society need to acknowledge the limitations of only knowing the world through thinking, ideas, and concepts that are found primarily in books, journal articles, videos, and social media. More focus is needed on the affective, or emotional aspects of food and JEDI issues and approaches to addressing these issues. It is important to include how we feel, and how feeling relates to motivation, purpose, and connection. As well, strong emotions can hinder continued action towards socially just

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Figure 2: The House that Modernity Built

and decolonial food futures (e.g., despair, apathy, shame/guilt, anger, defensiveness/denial). Transitions and changes typically come with resistances that are primarily emotional in nature (e.g., defensiveness, withdrawal, desire to please, deflect responsibility, denial, paralysis, apathy). Because of the power of these emotions to lead to despair, hopelessness and denial, it is important for people to develop and practise their skills around emotional regulation and identification.

Another missing piece in our current approaches to food systems (and other planning and policy areas) is that of a relational aspect. As human beings, we are deeply reliant on other people, on the land/planet, and on other living and non-living beings. Any progress toward food systems equity and resilience will require an understanding of the interconnectedness among these different aspects of the socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological systems in which we are embedded.

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In the workshop, an activity was used to identify and practise emotional regulation using a poem called: Why I Can't Hold Space for You Anymore. The poem is spoken to the participants and intended to elicit an emotional response. The facilitator used the bus as a metaphor for emotional 'passengers' (front, middle, and back; known and unknown people) and a 'driver' to support reflection and observation of emotionally charged states. At several pauses, the facilitator directed participants to identify what their emotional responses were, if some were more dominant than others, and to release any judgments that they might have about themselves for having a certain response.

Participants all noted strong emotional responses and found the poem to be rich and challenging. Some noted resistance to the poem and encountered a reaction of disbelieving the speaker. Another noted their feelings of guilt and shame for potential past behaviours where they might have negatively impacted someone. Others indicated feelings of vindication and validation to the tone and words of the poem, that is, the poem reflected their own experiences. These kinds of reactions are expected as we encounter different perspectives that challenge our own sense of the world and how we think of ourselves, particularly when confronting, owning, and acting on our complicity in maintaining oppressive and exploitative colonial systems. One participant reflected on the bus and poem as useful for sharing emotions, which is largely absent from 'mainstream' society and expectations for how to work in 'professional settings.' They also stated that there is a need to gain more experience in practising emotional regulation.

Exploring a Worst-Case Food Scenario

The final activity of the workshop involved participants developing a worst-case food system that exhibited the most unjust, inequitable, colonial, and exclusive characteristics possible. Participants were asked to describe the impacts on different groups of people, where power and authority resided, and how that power/authority would manifest (Figures 3). This enabled the examination of root causes, which many participants found useful. Some participants pointed out certain moral claims about food practices and systems (e.g., demonising fast food; celebrating local food). These moral claims come from specific cultural roots which have implications for recognitional and procedural

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dimensions of justice (i.e., whose morality is elevated over others, and is one hierarchy being replaced with another?).

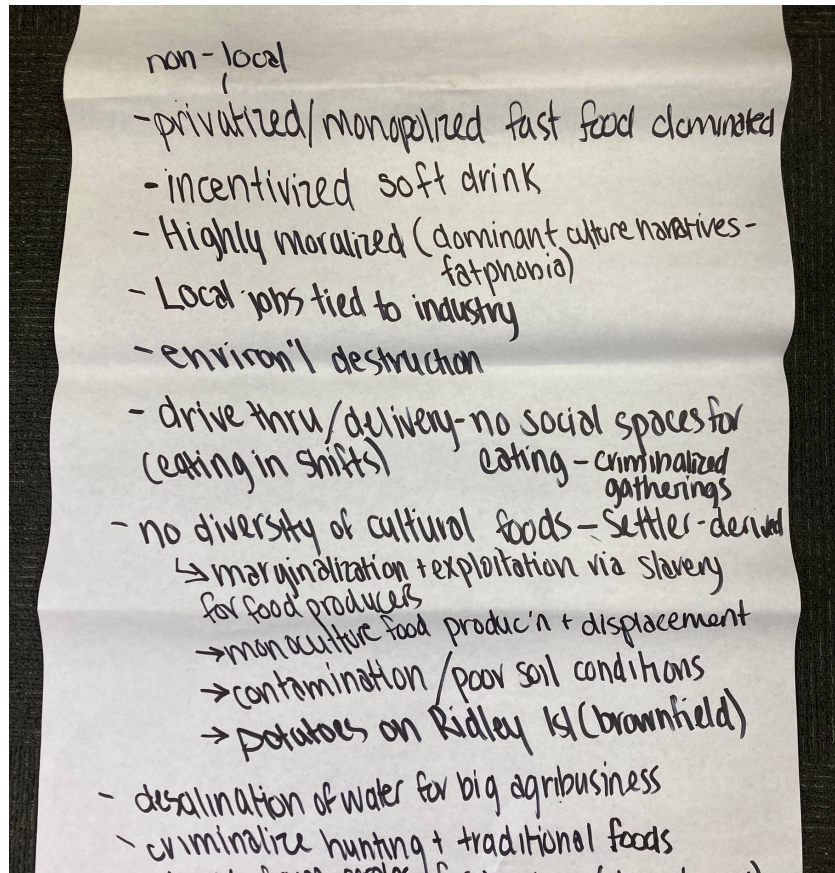


Figure 3: Example of Worst Case Food System

Participants were asked to examine their scenarios and to reflect on the question: is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form, resembles an aspect of the worst-case scenario? Then, participants identified steps that can be taken to prevent or mitigate the scenario (see Figure 4), drawing on concepts and ideas explored in the training workshop. For example, participants identified important guiding questions that reflect procedural and recognitional dimensions “Who decides what is good?” and “Where is the education taking place?” These kinds of questions help to acknowledge that power relations are unequal and that decision making on behalf of a group is paternalistic and assumes universality of approaches (see above and “if they only knew”).

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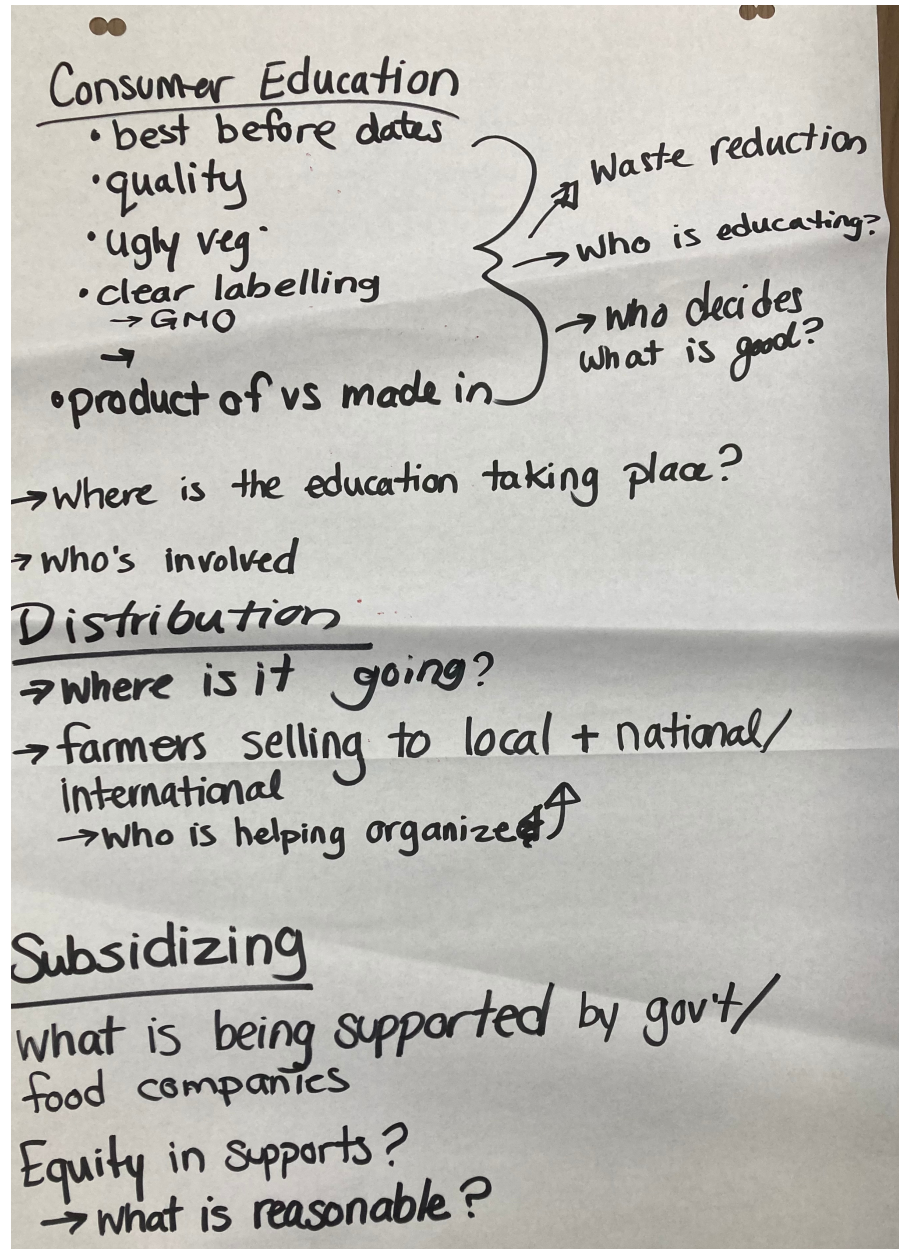


Figure 4: Example of steps to address the Worst Case Food System scenario

FINAL THOUGHTS

Advancing and making progress toward integrating justice and decolonial practices into food systems requires several steps and conditions. The first step is to acknowledge and recognize that we are colonial beings. The second involves decolonizing our own habits, thoughts and actions, which is incredibly challenging as these have been conditioned and reinforced for years. Doing so in isolation from others is particularly challenging, and collective approaches are needed (e.g., communities of practice, kitchen table talks, food policy councils, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour caucusing) that centre support, care, and reciprocity. Finally, interrupting patterns and years of conditioning is necessary and requires stamina, humility, playfulness, and seriousness.

We emphatically emphasise the importance of care and of support in reciprocal ways. Meaning that people across this community give and receive care and are accountable to one another in ways that can continue over the long haul. Ultimately, doing just, equitable, decolonial, and inclusive work requires stamina but will rely on strong relationships between people in and beyond Prince Rupert, to the Land, and to other living beings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Reimagining Food Systems Project Context & History

Project Background

Developing resilient, equitable food systems is a critical challenge for communities, which requires rethinking approaches to how the 'benefits and burdens' of food systems are distributed and how processes for decision-making navigate issues of representation and difference. This is best done through integrated, participatory approaches that include stakeholders in development in plans and policies that are grounded in local realities and food justice, and also capture relationships between food systems and sociocultural, economic, and environmental factors.

This project builds off of previous research conducted by PHABC in collaboration with the University of the Fraser Valley that explored local food policy in Kamloops, Vancouver, and Victoria. This research showed a high degree of interest in social justice, decolonizing the food system, and building reciprocal relationships with Indigenous and racialized peoples. However, many food interventions implemented and scoped at local levels were found to approach food security, access and sovereignty as universal categories that would benefit all residents equally. Analysis, similar to much of the scholarly literature, showed that universal food interventions (e.g., urban agriculture, developer tax-breaks, farmers' markets) often exacerbate and reproduce unequal hierarchies and that the benefits are not equally distributed. Participants in this project identified the need for understanding, support, and tools for how to integrate social justice and decolonial practices into food systems efforts.

There are many local food system interventions such as: community gardens/ farming, food banks and food donations, community/school meal programs, institutional food procurement, farmers' markets, food hubs, and food policy councils/ agricultural committees. These efforts may miss the mark on the urgent inequities facing community members (e.g., poor working conditions, land dispossession, food insecurity, social isolation). This project aims to build capacity of local governments, and food system stakeholders, to embed and measure progress on social justice efforts into food planning by:

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Employing community-engaged and participatory methods with rural Settler communities to build capacity for addressing food injustices:

- Co-design of an evaluation framework for assessing movement towards JEDI (justice, equity, decolonized, and inclusion) outcomes via local food system initiatives;
- Create a planning tool that centres JEDI and decolonial practices to achieve just and sustainable food systems.

Scope & Future Intentions

We are currently working with three communities across BC: Revelstoke, Prince George, and Prince Rupert. The project will develop equity tools and build local capacity through a series of workshops and individual coaching. The project timeline is from October 2022 to September 2023, with possibilities for extension dependent on further support and funding to be obtained by project partners, community organisations, and academic institutions. The ultimate direction of this project is unknown as we expect capacity building, imagining and enacting food futures to be an interactive and dynamic process. The focus is less on the direction and more on building relationships of reciprocity and accountability, with community-based research supporting local initiatives and needs.

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Appendix B: List of Attending Organisations

List of Participating Organizations
Ecotrust Canada
City of Prince Rupert
Ts'msyen Society
School District 52
Coast Mountain College
BC Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries
Royal Roads University
Rainbow Farm

APPENDICES

Appendix C: Justice, equity, decolonizing practices, and inclusion (JEDI) workshop agenda and activities

Order	Activity Type	Description
1	Participant Input	Circle Round of Introductions
2	Participant Input	Welcome & Land Acknowledgement
3	Participant Input	Whiteness at Work – Community Agreement to Work Together – A Care-Centred Approach
4	Researcher Presentation	Presentation on procedural food justice and food sovereignty
5	Participant Input	Circle Discussion Activity - Why I Can No Longer Hold Space for You Poem
6	Participant Input	Making Space for What is Possible - Worst Case Food System Scenario
7	Participant Input	Closing Circle

APPENDICES

Appendix D: JEDI resources for workshop participants

For JEDI concepts generally please check out....

- Watch: [A Beginners Guide to Decolonization - Kevin Lamoureux at TEDxSurrey](#)
- Read: [Racial Equity Project Core Concepts/Glossary](#) (explore both of these)
- Watch: [Shouldering our Colonial Backpack](#) (more academic in language but
- Listen: [DEI After 5 - Understanding the History of DEI \(Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion\) with Lolita Chandler](#) worth the struggle!) - Vanessa Andreotti
- Read: [The Citizens Handbook](#)

For how this shows up in our food systems take a look at...

- Watch: [Food + Justice = Democracy - LaDonna Redmond at TEDxManhattan 2013](#)
- Read / Listen: [White Supremacy Culture in Food Systems](#) (read the report or listen to [this podcast](#))
- Read: [Food Justice Primer](#)