

Grant Fund Case Study

Potluck Cafe Society

Potluck Cafe Society is an award-winning social enterprise. It owns and operates Potluck Cafe & Catering Inc., creating opportunities for people with barriers to employment. Its mission is to transform lives while creating jobs and providing healthy food for people living in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). The Potluck Cafe opened its doors in 2001 and has since expanded into a successful corporate catering operation with annual revenue of over \$1 million. It is a leader and a collaborator in a movement that uses training and employment as a dignified means of helping people regain their confidence, skills, and economic independence. The society also runs a number of food security programs to improve access to healthy food. Since opening, Potluck has provided over 325,000 hours of employment, resulting in over \$4 million in wages and served over 290,000 nutritious meals to residents of the DTES.

INFO

Grant Fund Manager:
Vancity Community Foundation

Pillar Addressed:
Access to Appropriate and Timely Financing

Support Provided:
\$30,389 Grant



Acquisition of Commercial Space



Improved Business Management



Improved Operations



Increased Services and Programs

Potluck Cafe Society received two grants amounting to \$30,389. The funds were used to strengthen Potluck’s marketing strategy and support its move into a new location.

Potluck has a solid history of being financially sustainable while meeting its community mission goals. However, in recent years they have faced some challenges in maintaining sales. This can be related to an increase in catering competition, transitions at the executive level, an outdated marketing and growth strategy, and operating in an inadequate space. While Potluck has grown significantly in the last 19 years, their physical infrastructure has remained the same, which has limited growth. During lucrative business cycles, they were compelled to turn away valuable business, losing revenue and potential customers.

The first grant provided the opportunity for Potluck Cafe to explore new revenue streams and understand how to improve its product and service offerings to its current customer base, including office deliveries, events, food production, and food rescue. The second grant allowed Potluck Cafe to conduct facility planning due diligence, including some financial modelling, before securing a new location. After searching for a number of months they secured a new location, considerably larger than their old space. They are excited about the opportunity to grow their business, diversify programming, and explore new opportunities to serve the DTES in this larger facility. Potluck is planning to move to its new home in late summer of 2020.

IMPACT

The grants allowed Potluck Cafe to hire expert consultants to support the social enterprise in its effort to improve service delivery and customer retention. The second grant enables Potluck to understand the capital costs and capital budget required for the move, which prompted the social enterprise to seek additional capital and look for potential new locations.



With these two grants, Potluck Cafe successfully identified ways to increase sales and operation capacity to further its social impact in the DTES. The new space will enable them to better support their employees, and by strengthening sales strategies, the enterprise will be able to maintain (and potentially increase) social employment. Lastly, Potluck was able to identify their key customer segments and retention strategies through the customer discovery work and industry analysis, which helped them develop a data-driven marketing framework to engage with current and potential clients.

GOING FORWARD

Both the development and the implementation of new marketing strategies and moving into a new space will enable Potluck to hire more residents of the DTES and increase its profits that go towards funding their DTES food security programs. The grants contributed to helping Potluck's move forward with its growth strategy which will enable the social enterprise to become more sustainable in the long term.

For more information, please contact:

Alexandre Applin, Evaluation Manager, S4ES
alex@s4es.ca

