



CANADIANS OF SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGES MUSEUM

**What We've Heard So Far**  
*August 2024*



Ministry of  
Tourism, Arts,  
Culture and Sport

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# Executive Summary



The current phase of public engagement to inform the vision for a new museum highlighting the histories, cultures, and contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages in British Columbia launched on April 2nd, 2024.

## Themes and Findings to Date

The data from the online survey collected in this phase of engagement is providing general themes and sentiments, but it lacks a deeper, nuanced reflections of broader public opinion. This update provides preliminary community feedback regarding the general direction for this project to advance. Additional findings and results are expected to emerge as engagement continues, and the full data set is collated, assessed through community lens and published in the final *What We Heard Report* sometime in early 2025.

The early engagement results contained in this update, largely reflect the input from Punjabi-Sikh community members and organizations. This is not a surprising result, given the Punjabi Sikh community makes up the majority of the South Asian population in B.C., estimated to be approximately 60% of the South Asian population<sup>1</sup>. Broader input is needed, requiring further work to capture voices across and within all communities of South Asian heritages.

Several common narratives and ideas, reflecting the desired vision and purpose of the museum are emerging. Further analysis, ensuring appropriate community lens are applied, and engagement are needed to determine the feasibility and community support for implementing the proposed vision.

What is abundantly clear and provides a strong convergence in the current engagement results are the values and attributes that individuals and communities find important for this museum. There is a general consensus that a physical representation of the contributions and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages will strengthen cultural connections, provide a sense of belonging and recognize and preserve an important part of Canada's and B.C.'s history. Additionally, there is a desire to cultivate a community-focused, inclusive and multicultural space – where everyone can find connection and belonging.

The momentum of this project has shifted positively since its early planning and engagement phases. Further adjustments to the approach, in response to feedback, will allow the mission, vision, name and location to naturally emerge in a self-actualized way for communities. This will also allow engagement that is proportionally representative of communities of South Asian heritages within B.C.'s overall population.

This engagement is a critical part of the development of this cultural initiative. However, the establishment of a museum is a complex and multi-year initiative with many more phases ahead. Community engagement is needed through all elements of this work and will continue through subsequent project phases.

<sup>1</sup> Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - British Columbia [Province] (statcan.gc.ca)

# Introduction

The objective of this engagement is to gather ideas and input from the public, with a particular emphasis on communities whose histories, cultures, stories, and contributions will be integral to this initiative.

Engagement questions focus on the following key themes:

- **The purpose of this space and how it should be used;**
- **Who it will serve;**
- **What the impact might be for B.C.; and**
- **Considerations for potential locations, to inform future decision processes.**



## Guiding Principles



Inclusion & equity



Relationship-based



Transparency



Anti-racism & anti-casteism



Respect for different kinds of knowledge



Alignment with UNDRIP, DRIPA



Accessibility



Trauma-informed



Community-driven

## Approach

The goal of this engagement is to capture a diverse range of perspectives, both across communities and within communities. As a result, current engagement opportunities were designed to:

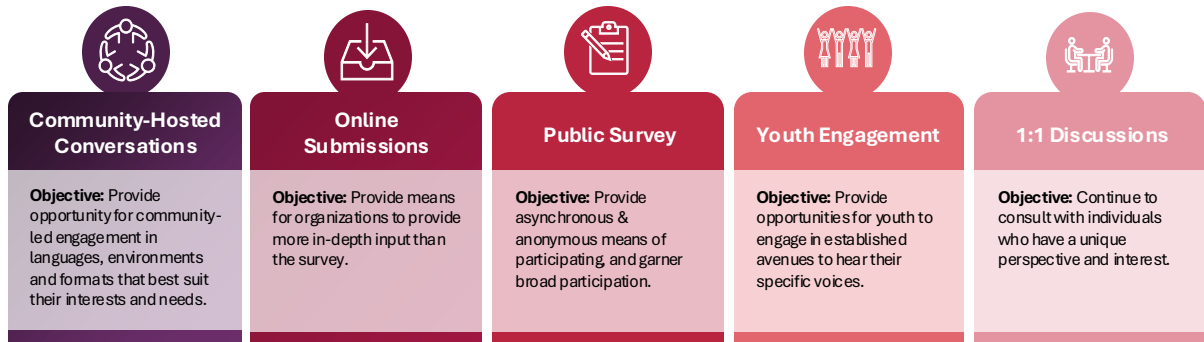
- **Be province-wide;**
- **Provide multiple ways to participate and reduce barriers to participation; and**
- **Reach communities where they are, utilize existing networks of relationships, and actively seek out missing voices.**

The scope of this engagement is to inform the vision for a new museum and does not include major decisions on content, design, location, or operations. Subsequent decisions and planning will occur based on the vision created through this process.

# Methodology and Demographic Representation

## Engagement Pathways

Current engagement opportunities offer multiple pathways for individuals and organizations to participate, aiming to achieve both breadth and depth of input. All engagement pathways are running concurrently.



Below is a summary of engagement participation for each of the pathways, as of July 20th, 2024:

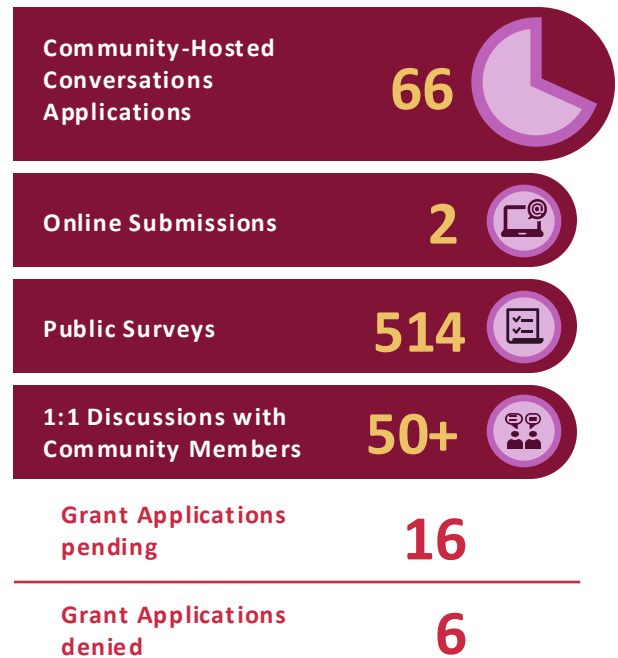
**Community-Hosted Conversations:** To date, 66 grant applications have been received, with 44 approved and in varying stages of delivery. The approved and pending applications target a participant reach of approximately 9,000 people. Feedback from community-conversation reports received to date have been incorporated into this report. There are 16 applications that are pending and 6 applications that were denied.

**Online Submissions:** Two submissions received to date.

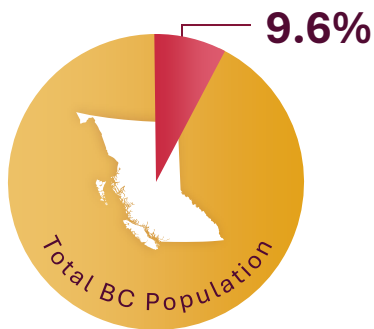
**Public Survey:** 514 survey responses.

**Youth Engagement:** Three of the community-hosted sessions to date were exclusively with youth, totaling 461 youth engaged. This total is included in the 726 participants noted above.

**1:1 Discussions:** There have been more than 50 individual discussions with community members since the work was first initiated.



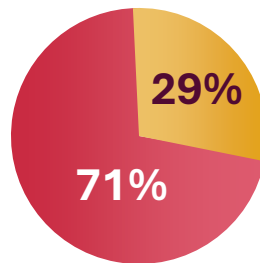
## Demographics Overview



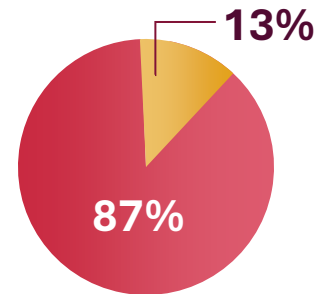
SOUTH ASIAN AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL BC POPULATION<sup>1</sup>

## Participants Identifying as South Asian

● South Asian ● Other

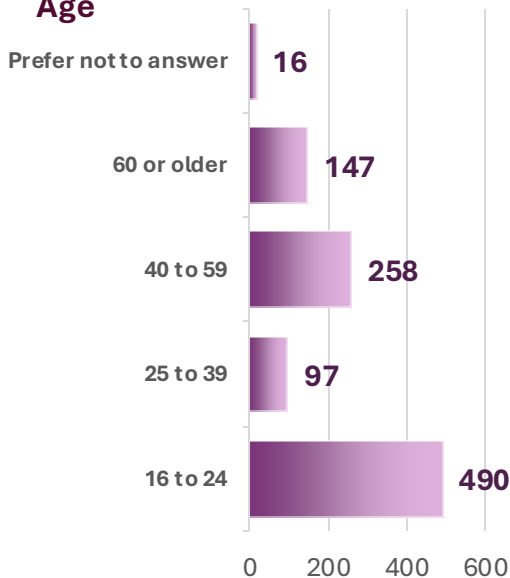


SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

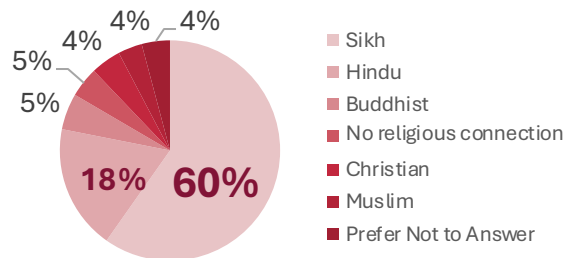


COMMUNITY-LED CONVERSATIONS

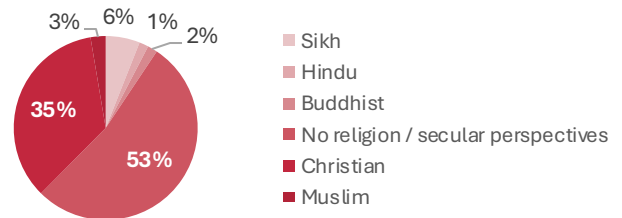
## Age



## Religion of Participants



RELIGIONS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL BC POPULATION<sup>2</sup>



## Assumptions & Limitations

Demographic data is representative of all the engagement pathways. In some community-led conversation reports, age was reported as a broad range across participants (e.g., 40-75). In these cases, for the purposes of reporting, even distribution of age across the number of participants was assumed.

The survey data reported is the value for net responses. This refers to the survey count after corrupted, or duplicate data was removed from the data set. None of the questions in the survey were mandatory, which means that the response rate for each question was variable. As such, demographic characteristics were not cross-compared.

<sup>1,2</sup> Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - British Columbia [Province] (statcan.gc.ca)

# Trends and Key Considerations

**As engagement is still underway, this update reflects preliminary findings.**

**Community-led conversations continue, with report-backs being received on an ongoing basis.**

**Once collected, the input and perspectives from these conversations will enhance and bolster key findings over the next several months.**



## Key Considerations

### *Engagement Process*

A key goal of this engagement is to represent the diverse communities of South Asian heritages, as well as to capture as many voices in the process. A common theme arising from the input received to date has been around the importance of multiculturalism, cultural inclusivity, and promoting values of diversity in the museum.

### *Survey Responses*

Survey responses constitute a larger portion of the feedback included in this update. Further, there has been an approximate 50% response rate on the qualitative questions in the survey to date. The implications of this being that there is currently limited input with which to explore perceptions and nuances and draw conclusions from in-depth thematic analysis.

## Adjustments

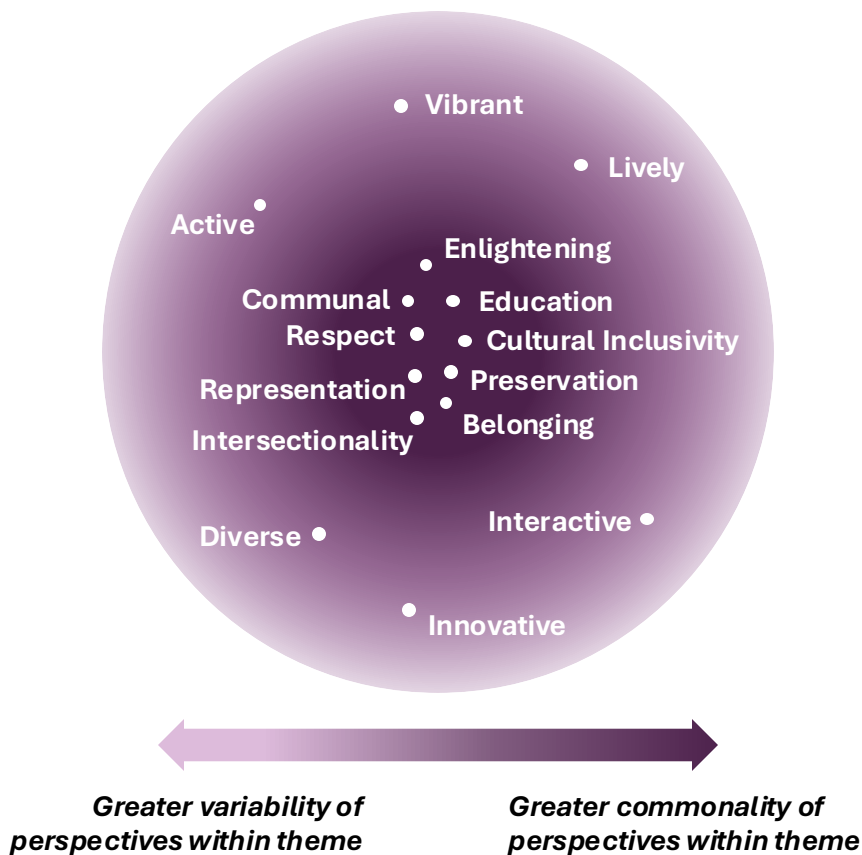
### *Modified Engagement*

Significant engagement has been undertaken, however, to sufficiently capture the wide range of perspectives across and within communities. Adjustments to the engagement approach, focusing outreach and consultation more specifically on the voices that haven't yet been captured, are under consideration. These additional consultations and input are needed to reflect the voices of the communities this museum is intended to serve.

## Understanding Perspectives

As we proceed to collect more feedback, the identified similarities and differences between themes is anticipated to evolve, providing a more comprehensive understanding of diverse cultural viewpoints.

The visual representation below outlines the central themes we have heard from the engagement so far. Elements positioned near the center of the circle signify the most common themes, whereas those on the periphery indicate less common or outlier themes.



Acknowledging both the common and outlier themes is important to the authenticity of this space. They represent the multifaceted values of individuals and communities, highlighting the complexity of creating an inclusive cultural space that encompasses intersectionality.



# What We've Heard Thus Far: Key Themes And Insights

It is integral to recognize that the province was not always welcoming to people with South Asian heritages. Canadian communities of South Asian heritages have been subject to extensive discrimination, exclusion and racism which continues to manifest. Looking back there are various established instances of harm to these communities. Discrimination through the restriction of immigration for women and children; families of already arrived Canadians of South Asian heritages. Exclusion through disenfranchisement and restrictions on the ability to come and go from Canada. As well as many overt acts of racism through work, education, and community.

The development of a first of its kind museum to honour Canadians of South Asian heritages is rooted in addressing historical wrongs. This is a complex and personal issue for affected individuals and communities, that still actively impacts British Columbians. Although the establishment of a culturally specific museum of this nature has the potential to have a significant impact, it is not a complete solution to challenges experienced across communities.

Initial findings, themes and insights are helpful in guiding the future of this project. However additional analysis and correlation of findings in relation to demographic representation is needed. What is clear in these findings is that there are many things for Canadians of South Asian Heritages to celebrate, preserve and share within communities and the rest of British Columbia.

***What is the key understanding visitors should take away from the museum / cultural centre?***

***“How and why South Asians made the choices, struggles and achievements to become a part of Canadian society.***

***Understanding the courage, challenges, and separation to make a better life in Canada while holding strong their own ancestral cultural beliefs while integrating into Canadian culture.”***

- Survey participant

***“A deep understanding of the cultures, highlighting not just the beautiful differences, but also how the similarities between all cultures should bring us together.”***

- Survey participant



## Purpose

**Education** – On the history of Canadians of South Asian heritages establishing themselves in B.C., despite hardships and discrimination.

**Preservation** – Of stories, cultural identities, physical artifacts and various art forms that form the tapestry of community identity.

**Belonging** – For Canadians of South Asian heritages in a visible and tangible way that feels rooted in culture and heritage. But also, for all who identify in a variety of ways in relation to their South Asian heritage or nationality here in Canada.

**Respect** – Of each other and our differences; of the progress that has been made by individuals and communities. Especially the validity of lived experience, cultural and interpersonal values even if they may be different and varied from others.

**Representation** – Of individuals and communities who do not see their likeness, families, culture and heritage reflected to them within the museum sector and more broadly.

**Vibrant** – A space that exudes South Asian design and aesthetic allowing for voices, stories and connections to emerge for the community.

**Lively** – A space that facilitates celebrations, gatherings and events while also providing a community hub for day-to-day activities and programs.

**Active** – There is a sense that this museum should also be outward reaching, not only grounded in physical space but also reaching out to become an active entity within South Asian Canadian communities.

**What kind of lasting impact do you hope the museum / cultural centre has?**

*“I hope it fosters a sense of pride in the cultural heritage, Promotes understanding and appreciation for diverse perspectives.*

*Along with inspiring curiosity and learning, I hope it creates dialogue, reflection, connection, and empowers individuals to engage with their history/culture or is an opportunity to learn about a culture you might not be familiar with.”*

- Survey participant



## Vision

**Enlightening** – For all who visit. Observing history, struggles, progress, values and cultural practices of South Asian Canadian individuals and communities that will foster acceptance and multiculturalism.

**Communal** – In all aspects from operational exhibits and displays to the active programming and utilization of the space. This museum needs to be led by individuals of community and geared towards benefiting community life.

**Cultural Inclusivity** – Of all cultures within the South Asian heritages, how these cultures have deepened through establishment in Canada and the shared histories and commonalities between other cultures, like Indigenous Communities.

**Interactive** – A place that actively gives back to the visitor and community. While also providing a new museum experience that is different than the more widely known traditional museum format.

**Innovative** – With ideas, technology, exhibits and displays. A place to explore new ways of art, culture, history and more broadly what community looks like.

**Diverse** – In representation and content. Space for everyone, from all walks of life and different perspectives to share in South Asian heritages. This must be done so that everyone can participate and engage with the space in a safe, inclusive and accessible way.

**Intersectionality** – Of how the past, present and future impact communities today. As well as the multi-faceted identity of many Canadians of South Asian Heritages.

**“(I hope) that it would raise the visibility of the contributions and continued value South Asians bring to our province. That it would create more respect and awareness, improve relationships and a sense of community for all British Columbians.”**

- Survey participant

## Name

There have been many suggestions made regarding the name of the museum. Currently, the most popular names are of a similar variation, all including the term 'South Asian'. The naming options are divided on labelling the entity as a 'museum'.

In selecting a name there needs to be awareness of sensitivity of many individuals and communities around the term 'South Asian'. In addition, additional themes and comments include:

- Several suggestions for non-English names (primarily in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi) with meanings such as: one, home/our house, emulation, earth, direction, life story, heritage, selfless service, companionship, the world is one family
- Be conscious of the colonial connotations of including "British Columbia"
- Reference the Indigenous lands we live on
- Name after a South Asian Historian or prominent South Asian Canadian
- Do not include South Asian in title unless it equally addresses all with South Asian origins
- The name should reflect cultural heritage or geographic origins, and should not be based in religion
- The name should reflect multiplicity

### Top Three Names

**1** South Asian Museum / South Asian Cultural Centre / South Asian Museum & Cultural Centre

**2** South Asian Canadian Museum / Cultural Centre

**3** Museum of South Asian Heritages / South Asian Heritage Centre

### OCCURRENCE OF KEY WORDS

South Asia / South Asian

59%

Museum

59%

Culture / Cultural Centre

29%

Canada / Canadian

21%

Heritage

20%

BC

11%

History

5%



## Location

1

### Surrey

Surrey is the most recommended location for the museum. This adequately aligns with the demographic representation of South Asian communities across B.C. Surrey presents a unique opportunity to celebrate important cultural and historical aspects. Additionally, Surrey is projected to be the largest city in B.C., surpassing Vancouver providing a unique and beneficial urban and economic backdrop for the museum.

Multiple suggestions have been made for a more specific location in Surrey, including:

- **Newton**
- **City Centre**
- **Fleetwood**

2

### Vancouver

Vancouver is the second most recommended location for the museum. Vancouver boasts several significant historical sites for Canadians of South Asian Heritages, such as the Punjabi Market and Komogata Maru Memorial. Additionally, Vancouver enables a vast and reliable tourist environment for the museum to benefit from. The most recommended locations within Vancouver include:

- **Vancouver Punjabi Market**
- **Downtown**

3

### Other Regions

Regional representation has also been highlighted, including important communities and locations on Vancouver Island and within the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions. These recommendations are typically associated with another historical site of importance. This may present an opportunity to further bolster existing heritage and cultural establishments in addition to this museum.

# Acknowledgements

The advancement of the Canadians of South Asian Heritages museum has been a dynamic and evolving process. As such, many individuals and communities have helped shape the current engagement opportunities available. The accessibility that this engagement achieves would not have been possible without these inputs.

We are grateful to all the individuals, organizations and communities that have spent time discussing, engaging and celebrating this project, actively contributing to shaping the museum's future. A special thanks to the Ministerial Advisory for shaping the engagement framework and championing this work through communities. We also recognize SFU's Centre for Dialogue in providing support during early project and engagement planning.

# Appendix A: Grant Recipients

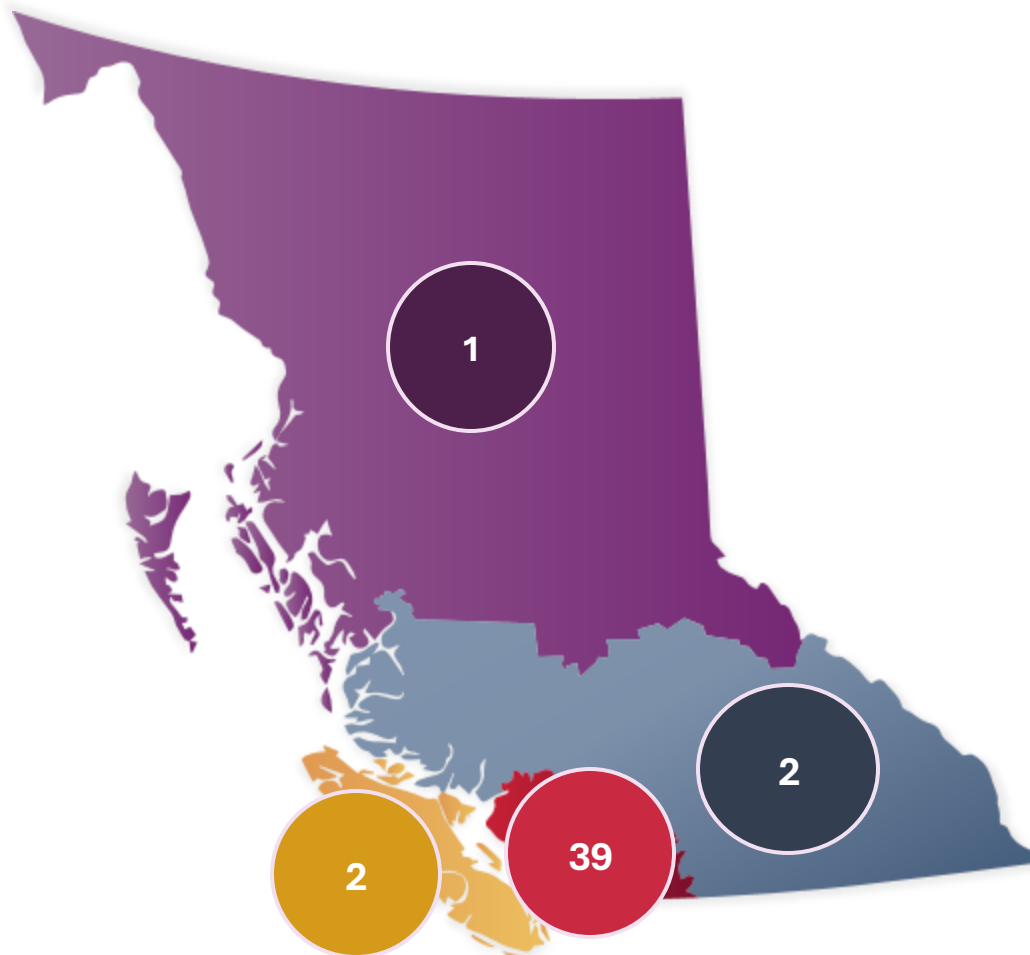
North – 1 grant approved

Lower Mainland – 39 grants approved

Vancouver Island – 2 grants approved

Interior – 2 grants approved

Total – 44 grants approved





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