



CANADIANS OF SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGES MUSEUM

What We Heard Report

August 2025



Ministry of
Tourism, Arts,
Culture and Sport

Minister's Message



On behalf of the Government of British Columbia, I'm honoured to acknowledge the vibrant contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages to the social, cultural, and economic life of our province.

In April 2024, we launched a grant program to support community hosted dialogues to hear directly from communities across the province about the vision for a new museum celebrating the contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages to B.C. We're now releasing the What We Heard report — a summary of the ideas, hopes, and perspectives shared by more than 16,000 people through community-led conversations, youth engagement, one-on-one discussions, and an online survey.

We heard clearly that people want this space to be inclusive, community-led, and accessible — a place that reflects the diverse cultures and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages and invites the broader public to learn and connect. Many shared a desire for the museum to preserve stories, celebrate identities, and highlight the contributions, past and present, and ongoing experiences of Canadians of South Asian heritages in B.C.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate and share your thoughts. Whether you completed a survey, joined a community conversation, or helped spread the word, your voices have shaped this report. They will continue to guide us as we explore how best to support a museum that is shaped by — and for — the communities it represents.

Thank you again for your vision, time and commitment to building something meaningful for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Kang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anne" and last name "Kang" clearly distinguishable.

Hon. Anne Kang,

Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport

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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 engagement. This work would not have been possible without this support.

We are grateful to all the individuals, organizations and communities that have spent time discussing, engaging and imagining this project, and actively contributing to shaping the museum's future. A special thanks to the Ministerial Advisory for designing the engagement framework, guiding its implementation and championing this phase of work.

No aspect of this engagement was simple, and no aspect of creating this new museum will be simple. Museums are complex. It means that sharing and building on one another's ideas in a spirit of genuine collaboration is vital.

We understand that there are issues and sensitivities regarding the term 'South Asian' and it can be a divisive term. The terms 'South Asian' or 'South Asian Canadian' share the virtues and the shortcomings of any broad category: these categories reveal as much as they obscure. The temporary working name "Canadians of South Asian Heritages Museum" is a placeholder for this initiative until an official name can be determined by the communities who will shape and define the space.

Executive Summary

From April 2024 to April 2025, the Province undertook a public engagement initiative to inform the vision for a new museum celebrating the contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages to B.C. This engagement initiative was guided by the principles of equity, inclusion, accessibility, cultural safety, anti-racism, and anti-casteism. It provided multiple, different opportunities for participation, where communities, groups, and individuals from across the province could share their vision for a museum including its location, name, and vision.

In the context of this report, the term 'museum' refers to an evolving and inclusive space that fosters connection and celebrates the diverse cultures and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages.

This engagement sought feedback from a wide and diverse range of perspectives with the aim of understanding what is shared and what is unique and distinctive, between and within communities.

What We Heard: Summary of Findings

Engagement focused on gathering feedback regarding the following topics:

- **The purpose of the museum and how it should be used;**
- **Who the museum will serve;**
- **What the impact of the new museum might be for B.C.;** and
- Considerations for **locations for the museum** to inform future decisions and planning.



Participants noted the desire for the museum to serve Canadians of South Asian heritages with an inclusive space that preserves, maintains, and celebrates the broad diversity of Canadians of South Asian heritages. The importance of promoting understanding and acceptance of Canadian cultures rooted in South Asian heritages in B.C. was noted, as were considerations related to creating a space that is accessible to all peoples across the province.

A more detailed description of participant feedback is contained in subsequent sections of this report.

What should the purpose of the space be?

Participants noted a desire for a museum that fulfills the following purpose:

- **Educates people about the cultures, heritages, and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages across the province.**
- **Preserves Canadians of South Asian heritages stories, languages, and artifacts.**
- **Represents the cultural diversity and the contributions of Canadians of South Asian diasporas to B.C.**
- **Acknowledges and celebrates the many cultures, events, and holidays of Canadians of South Asian heritages and encourages community interactions.**
- **Serves as a gathering or cultural hub where the diversity of Canadians of South Asian heritages can be shared and celebrated.**

Who should the museum serve?

Feedback throughout the engagement indicated the museum should primarily serve Canadians of South Asian heritages in celebrating and preserving their cultures. Participants also noted the desire for a place where all visitors can learn about and directly experience the diversity of Canadians of South Asian heritages and cultures represented across the province.

What is the vision for this space or its intended impact?

The vision for the museum emerging from the findings is a place that:

- **Fosters understanding and acceptance;**
- **Is community led;**
- **Is safe, inclusive and accessible; and**
- **Is a place of exploration, experience and discovery;**
- **Serves as a community hub for connection and celebration.**

What might the *impact* of the museum be in British Columbia?

Participants noted the opportunity to increase understanding about the struggles, contributions, and progress of Canadians of South Asian heritages as they have settled in the province. This includes opportunities for the Province to address and acknowledge historical wrongs and empower Canadians of South Asian heritages with deep involvement and potentially ownership of the museum. The opportunity to create a sense of belonging and connection among Canadians of South Asian heritages in the province was also noted as a potential benefit of the space. Participants further highlighted the opportunity to create a meaningful space where Canadians of South Asian heritages can come together and celebrate their diverse cultures and heritages.

Where should it be located?

While Surrey and Vancouver were the top two locations noted for the museum, participants also raised the importance of grounding the decision in the purpose of the space and who it is meant to serve. While large metropolitan areas provide easy access for tourists and those living in the area, they may not be as successful in serving lesser-represented communities, newcomers, or communities in less-populated areas like Northern B.C. and Vancouver Island. Thinking about how space can be created beyond brick-and-mortar locations, and a hub-and-spoke model of service, were both noted as potential options for consideration.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize this engagement is a starting point, intended to be generative in gathering perspectives from communities about what they want this museum to be, and to better understand how to work with communities to create that space. Additional work will be required to inform future decisions regarding the vision, mission, name, and location of the museum.

Introduction

Background

Canadians of South Asian heritages have extensive, diverse and inspirational histories in British Columbia dating back to the early 1900's. The contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages, both past and present, are integral to the legacy and continued success of our province.

The Government of British Columbia committed to starting work to advance a museum recognizing the contributions and cultures of Canadians of South Asian heritages to B.C. in 2017, and again during the 2020 election. This initiative builds upon earlier projects like the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project (2014-2018) and the South Asian Canadian Legacy Project (2020-2022), led by the South Asian Studies Institute and supported through funding from the Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Branch of government.

The Province has reaffirmed its commitment through mandate letters beginning in 2020. The goals for this project are to gain insight from British Columbians of South Asian heritages on the vision for this new museum to celebrate, recognize, and share the stories, cultures, and successes of Canadians of South Asian heritages.



Objective

The objective of this engagement was to gather ideas and input from the public, with a particular emphasis on Canadians of South Asian heritages whose histories, cultures, stories, and contributions will be represented through this initiative. The purpose is to reflect these ideas and input in shaping a potential future museum.

Engagement questions focused on the following topics:

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

Guiding Principles



Inclusion & equity



Relationship-based



Transparency



Anti-racism & anti-casteism



Respect for different kinds of knowledge



Alignment with DRIPA



Accessibility



Trauma-informed



Community-driven

Approach

This engagement was designed to capture a diverse range of perspectives, both across and within communities. Therefore, engagement approaches reflected this intention by:

- **Including a province-wide scope;**
- **Providing multiple ways to participate and reducing barriers to participation;**
- **Reaching communities where they are;**
- **Utilizing existing networks of relationships; and**
- **Targeting outreach activities to actively seek out missing voices.**

The scope of this engagement was to inform the vision and purpose for a new museum, and did not include major decisions on content, design, location, or operations.

Engagement Goals

The goals of this engagement centered around capturing the diversity of voices from Canadians of South Asian heritages living in B.C., including:

Goal	Guiding Questions
Ensure engagement is authentically diverse	<i>Does engagement represent the different communities who originate from South Asia and capture the unique aspects of these communities?</i>
Seek to be intrinsically inclusive	<i>Commonalities between different communities originating from South Asia - how do these communities come together?</i>
Reach multi-generational voices	<i>Are we hearing the historical, present day, and future realities and lived experiences for all generations?</i>
Identify opportunities through engagement	<i>What may be a challenge in this process and do communities have ideas on how to resolve challenges?</i>
Ensure engagement captures diverse voices from across the South Asian diaspora	<i>Are there groups that we're not hearing from or are overrepresented?</i>
Maintain a provincially focused perspective	<i>What aspects of culture/community would communities like to share more widely with the people of BC?</i>
Identify location through engagement	<i>What is important in recognizing the significance of location for this space?</i>
Explore the concept of identity through engagement	<i>What do communities need to see, feel, and experience to feel the space is theirs?</i>



Methodology and Participation

Engagement Pathways

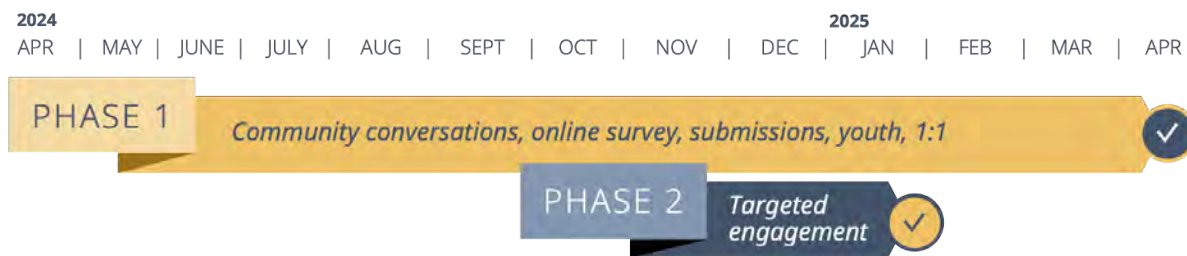
Engagement opportunities offered multiple pathways for individuals and organizations to participate, aiming to achieve both breadth and depth of input. Several of these engagement pathways ran concurrently.

OBJECTIVE

	Community-Hosted Conversations	To provide opportunity for community-led engagement in languages, environments, and formats that best suit their interests and needs.
	Online Submissions	To provide means for organizations to provide more in-depth input than the survey.
	Public Survey	To provide asynchronous & anonymous means of participating, and garner broad participation.
	Youth Engagement	To provide opportunities for youth to engage in established avenues to hear their specific voices.
	1:1 Discussions	To continue to consult with individuals who have a unique perspective and interest.
	Targeted Engagement	To ensure a broad range of voices are captured by actively inviting feedback from lesser-heard voices and subject matter experts.

Engagement Timeline

Initial engagement began in April 2023 followed by a survey and community hosted sessions between April 2024 and April 2025:



The feedback gathered through all engagement pathways, including targeted engagement efforts, have been included in the following sections.

Participation

Community-Hosted and Digital Engagement Efforts

The community-led and digital methods of engagement, including community-hosted conversations, online survey and submissions, youth engagement, and 1:1 discussions were all important components of the Engagement Framework designed by the Ministerial Advisory and supported by the SFU Center for Dialogue. These engagement methods focused on allowing participants to determine where, when, and how they would like to provide feedback the new museum. The intent of this approach was to offer channels that were accessible and inclusive, and to help create cultural safety and transparency of process for participants.

Community-Hosted Conversations

Community organizations were able to apply for grants to host engagement sessions with their members. These sessions were supported by a facilitator guide that organizers could use to develop their sessions, along with a reporting template to collect feedback.

Successful grant applicants provided their completed report to the Ministry project team. These reports were collected and collated, and the feedback is reflected in the body of this report.

A full list of grant recipients can be found in [Appendix A](#).



Public Survey

A public survey was available on the project website throughout the life of the engagement in English, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. 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.

Written Submissions

For those wishing to provide more detailed feedback than what the survey provided for, an email address was established to collect in-depth written feedback. Two submissions were received.

1:1 Discussions

Early in the project, multiple conversations occurred with individuals who had subject matter expertise and or who had lead earlier aspects of this project.

Targeted Engagement Efforts

A key goal of engagement was to represent the diverse populations of Canadians of South Asian heritages, and to capture as many voices as possible in the process. While initial engagement efforts were successful in capturing feedback from several thousand people, the input received did not fully capture the breadth of perspectives across and within the Canadian South Asian diasporas. For this reason, a targeted engagement effort was undertaken to ensure that the vision and mission of the museum would be informed by the multitude of voices it hopes to represent.

Targeted outreach focused on representation from less frequently heard voices, including those from the following ethnic origins:

Afghani	Bangladeshi	Bhutanese	Maldivian	Sri Lankan
Indo-Fijian	Indo-Guyanese	Indo-Caribbean	Pakistani	Nepalese

Efforts were also aimed at increasing representation from different regions across the province, with a focus on gathering input from groups in the Northern, Interior, Kootenay, and Vancouver Island regions. The input gathered through these efforts was collected through structured interviews with groups and individuals, as well as written submissions. Feedback was collated and the outcomes are reflected in the body of this report.

A full list of targeted engagement participants can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Group Interviews with Community Organizations

Multiple structured interviews were held with a variety of community-affiliated and multi-cultural organizations. This approach provided the ability to connect with communities that may have smaller populations or that do not have dedicated organizations. It also provided the ability to leverage networks of organizations to further connect with communities and groups. Participating community groups were offered an honorarium in appreciation for their time and contributions.

Community Organizations

Interviews

12



Written submissions

2



Written Submissions from Community Organizations

Two community-affiliated and multi-cultural organizations chose to submit their feedback in writing. Written submission respondents provided answers to the same targeted engagement questions as interview participants.

Conversations with Museum Professionals

Multiple structured interviews were held with individuals from the museum industry across B.C. and Ontario to gather learnings and best practices for creating culturally focused spaces.

Museum Professionals

Interviews

6



Conversations with Academics

Multiple structured interviews were held with professionals from academic institutions across B.C. specializing in Canadian South Asian diasporas, histories, and cultures. One written submission was also received from an academic professional. The feedback helped to establish a better understanding of academic research and thought leadership in Canadians of South Asian heritages, their diverse cultures, contributions, and histories in the province.

Academics

Interviews

4



Written submission

1



Youth Engagement

Over 2,345 youth were engaged through the survey, community-hosted conversations and targeted engagements.

Youth Engagement

Youths involved

2,345+



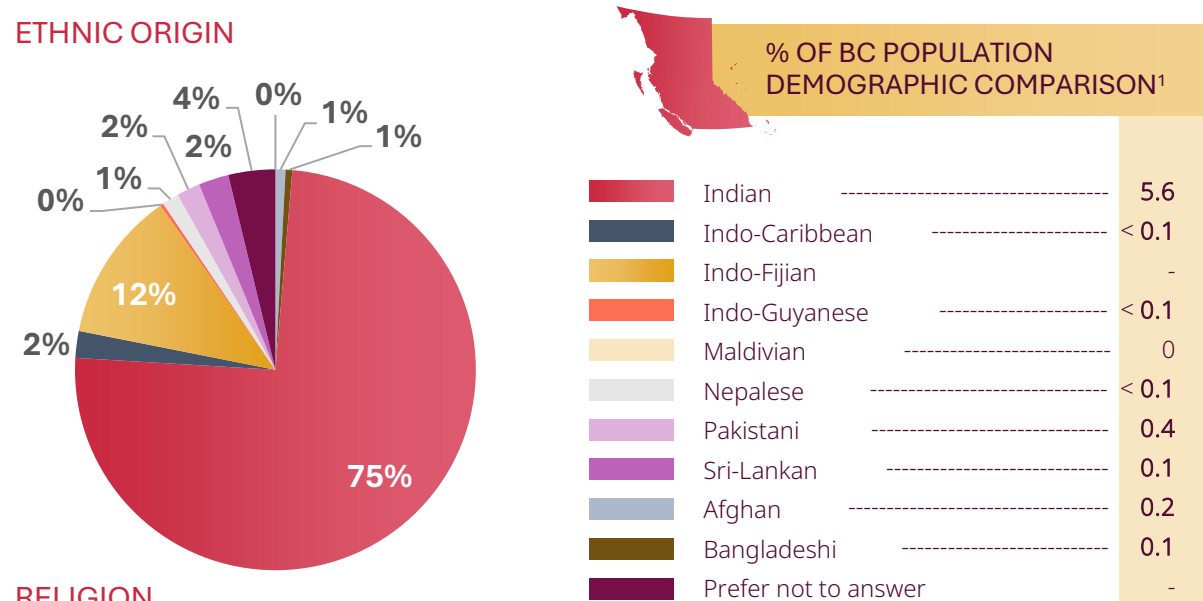
Demographic Overview

**The demographic data presented in the following four pages is organized by engagement method. Survey responses were collected through standardized dropdown menus for consistency and ease of analysis while community-led engagements relied on self-identification, respecting participants' autonomy.*

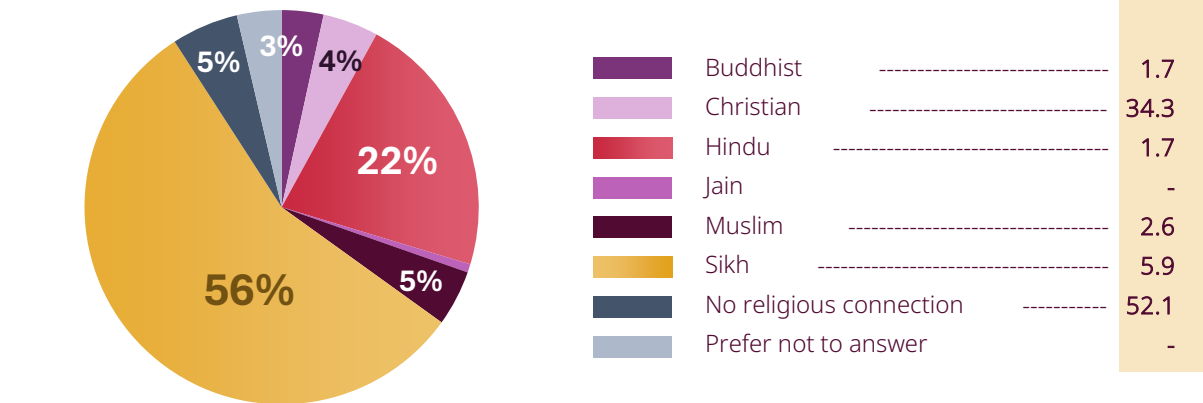
Survey Demographics

The following presents the demographic data collected from the public survey. The data has been categorized by ethnic origin, religion, language spoken at home, migration generation, and age. Where available, corresponding demographic data for the population of B.C. has been included to provide a point of comparison on representation percentages.

ETHNIC ORIGIN



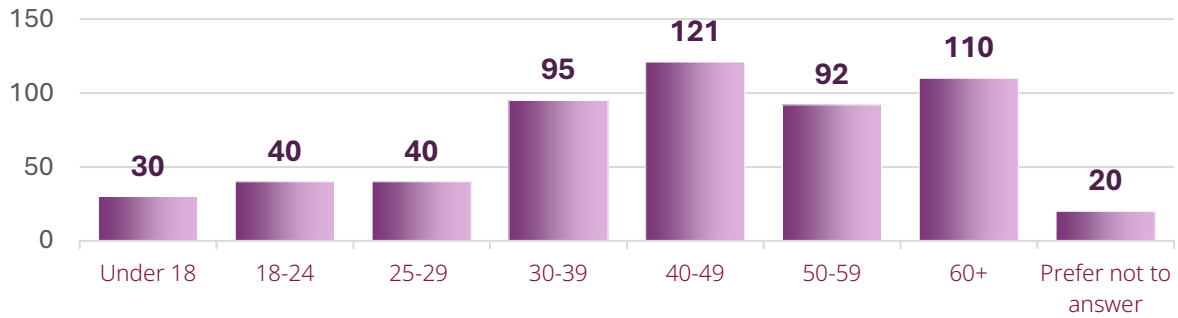
RELIGION



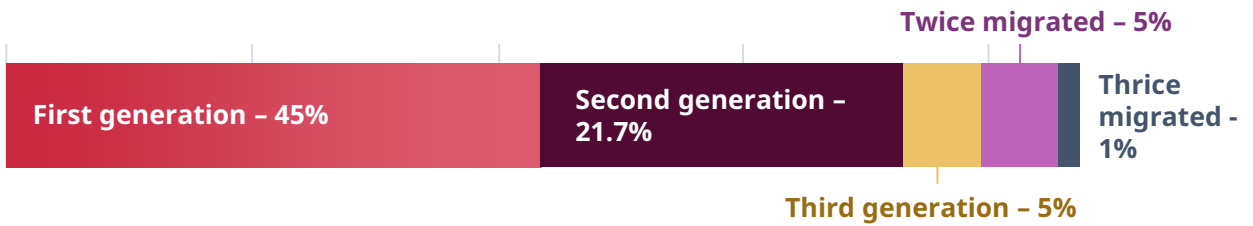
¹Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - British Columbia [Province] (statcan.gc.ca)

Survey Demographics Cont'd

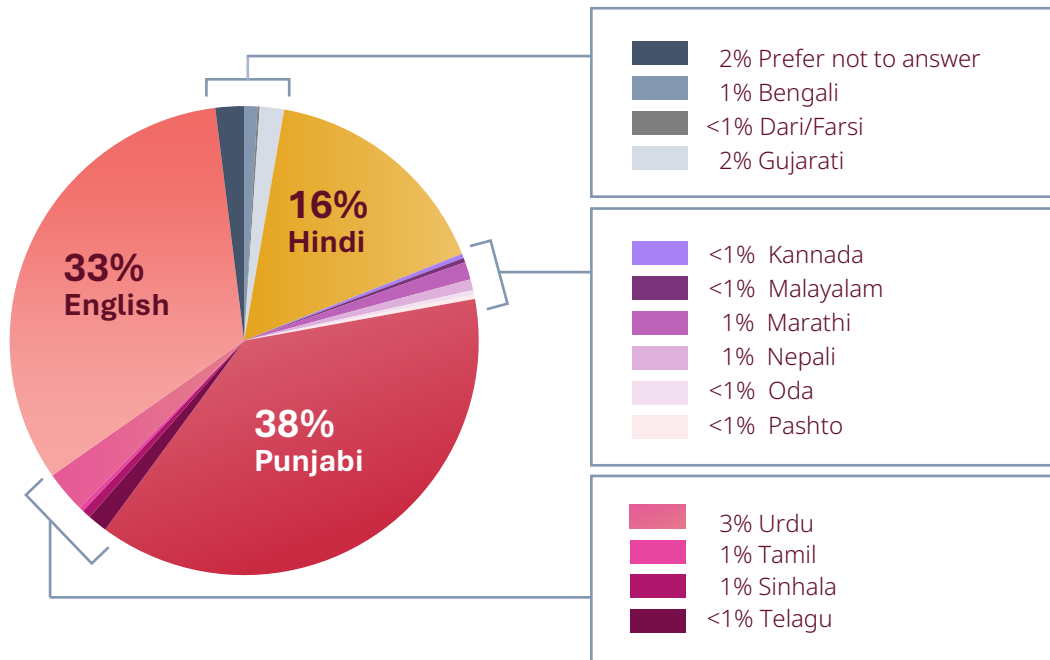
AGE



MIGRATION GENERATION



LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

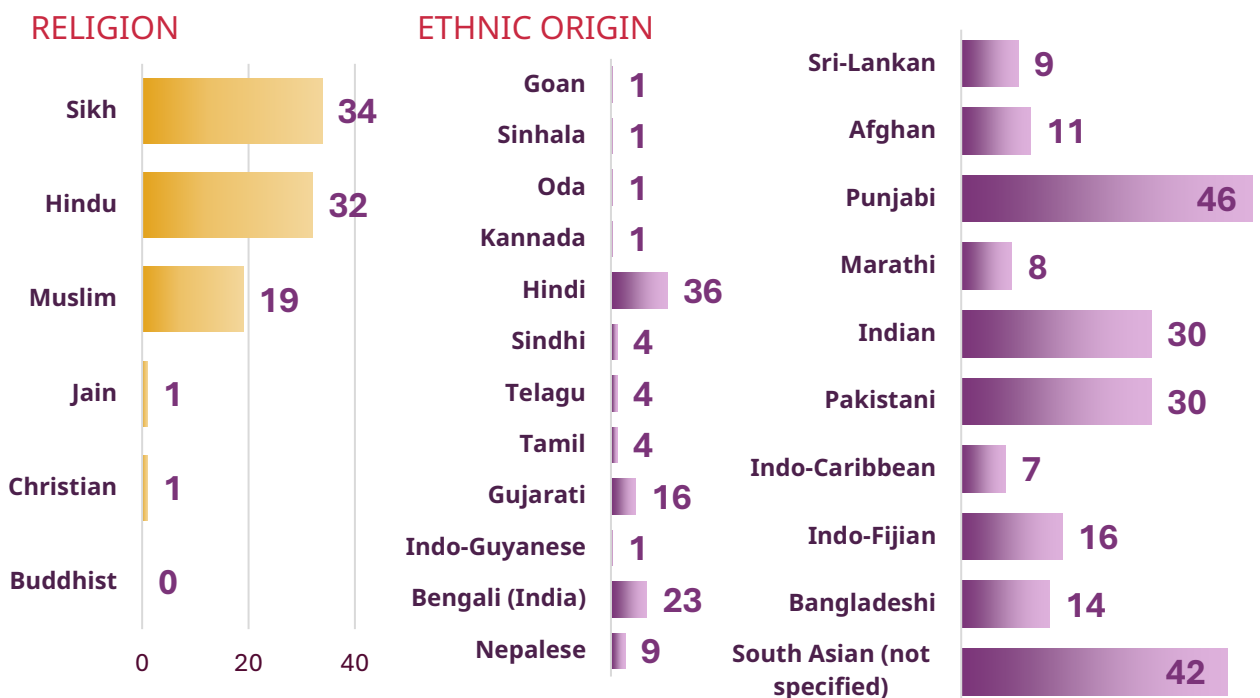


Community-Hosted Conversation and Targeted Engagement Group Conversation Demographics

The demographics that follow provide a high-level overview of the many voices involved in the 157 conversations with Canadians of South Asian heritages across B.C. as part of community-hosted sessions (145 sessions) and targeted engagement efforts (12 conversations with community organizations).

There is some ambiguity in the numbers due to the inconsistency of reports from community-hosted conversations. While some reports contained a detailed breakdown of participant demographics, other reports did not provide demographic formation. Of those that did report demographic information, multiple ways of identifying participants were used, e.g., ethnicity, language, religion. For this reason, the demographic information below doesn't represent a complete picture.

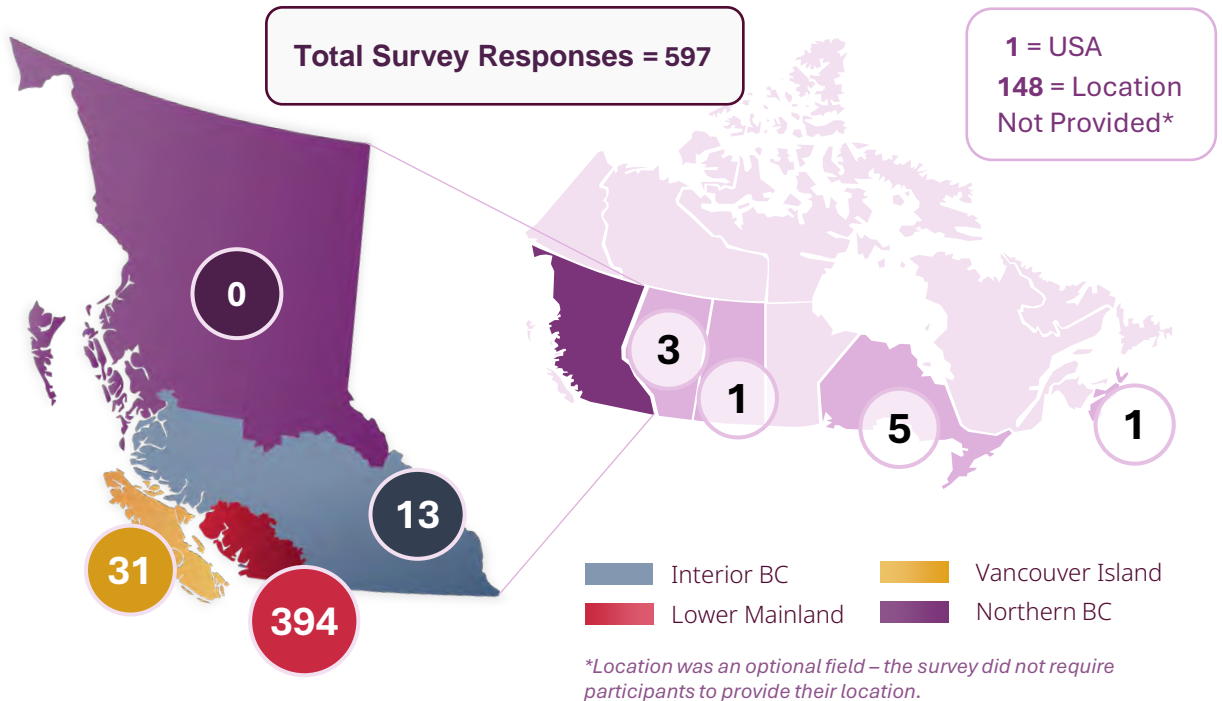
Unlike some regions where language and ethnicity may be recognized separately, within some Canadian South Asian communities, they are frequently co-defined, reflecting intersections of linguistic, cultural, and ancestral identity. Given the close connection between language and ethnicity in this context, many participants within the community-led conversations and targeted engagements identified their ethnicity based on language rather than country of origin. To acknowledge this and reflect a more culturally appropriate representation of the data, "ethnic origin" has been expanded to better represent the diversity of participating identities. Community-led conversations were delivered in English, Punjabi, Hindi, Marathi, Farsi, Urdu, Gujarati, and Bengali.



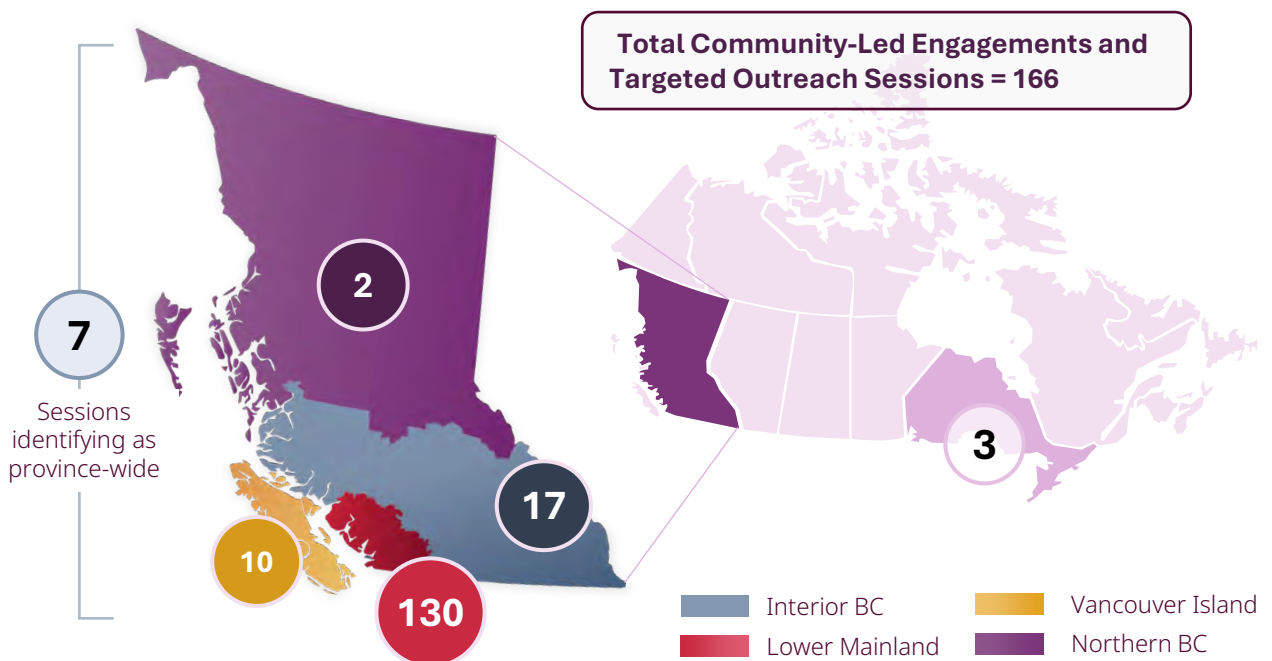
None of the 157 conversations reported including Bhutanese, Malayalam or Maldivian voices.

Geographic Distribution of Engagement

REPRESENTATION OF GEOGRAPHIC RESULTS – ONLINE SURVEY



REPRESENTATION OF GEOGRAPHIC RESULTS – COMMUNITY-LED ENGAGEMENTS AND TARGETED OUTREACH



Considerations and Limitations

When interpreting the data collected through the engagement process, it is important to acknowledge several limitations and considerations, including lack of data from some demographic communities and consistency. Understanding these limitations helps ensure that any insights are viewed within the proper context. The limitations and considerations for the survey, community-led conversations, and targeted discussions are outlined below.

Data Availability and Cross-Comparison

Demographic information was collected through each engagement pathway; however, the extent and level of detail varied. Since all the survey questions were optional, response rates for each demographic question varied. Similarly, the demographic information gathered through community-hosted conversations lacked consistency, as there were no standardized reporting requirements for demographic information. As a result, the availability of demographic data was limited, preventing cross-comparisons of demographic characteristics and sentiment analysis based on demographic categories.

Of note, the lack of consistency was primarily due to the flexibility provided to community-led hosts to design and deliver the sessions in a way that was appropriate to the intended audience group; greater focus was placed on the engagement questions, rather than the collection of demographic data. This approach also recognized that standardized demographic categories often fail to capture the nuances and diversity of personal identity and lived experiences. Therefore, the demographic approach prioritized respect for autonomy and cultural complexity by not requiring individuals to define their identity within a rigid framework during participation.

Less Frequently Heard Diaspora

Significant efforts were made to gather feedback from Canadians across the South Asian diaspora. Targeted outreach primarily relied on leveraging existing networks and identifying new contacts through desk-based research of community-based organizations. Despite these efforts, engaging certain communities—particularly those with lower representation in the province—proved challenging. Many community-based organizations were volunteer-run with limited capacity to participate, further restricting opportunities for engagement.

As a result, some populations remain marginally represented or are not represented in the feedback and themes within this report. These include:

Bhutanese Maldivian Indo-Caribbean Indo-Guyanese

What We Heard:

Key Themes and Insights

Across the engagement channels, participants were asked questions related to the vision and purpose of the proposed museum. Feedback for each concept was collected, analyzed, and summarized into overarching themes. Under each theme are key pillars, which highlight the essential ideas and recurring concepts raised by participants.

Purpose



Feedback that focused on what roles the museum should play was themed under 'purpose'. This feedback will help to inform a purpose statement that describes why the museum exists and who it intends to serve.

"There is representation in many aspects of the economy but limited understanding on what we have contributed towards the arts, culture, businesses that have been created, contributions towards education, etc."

- Survey respondent

Purpose Themes Summary

► To Educate ► To Represent ► To Preserve ► To Celebrate

Theme: To Educate

Participants emphasized the museum should foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Canadians of South Asian cultures, histories, and traditions through education and engagement. The museum should provide education for diverse audience groups, both those of South Asian and non-South Asian heritages, and in particular, youth. The museum could bridge cultural gaps and promote intercultural understanding by showcasing the diverse practices and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages. Participants noted the museum should serve as a space for **learning** about historical contributions and ongoing challenges, **teaching** youth about their cultural roots, and fostering **understanding** of Canadians of South Asian heritages.

Theme: To Educate

Key Pillars

LEARN: Participants noted the importance of learning about cultures, histories, and traditions of Canadians of South Asian heritages. This included understanding the diverse cultural practices and languages that define Canadians of South Asian heritages as well as gaining knowledge about the historical and ongoing challenges they face.

TEACH: Participants emphasized the active role of teaching, particularly to youth of Canadian South Asian heritages. This involved potentially creating educational programs or workshops that engage young people and help them engage with their cultural roots. Teaching also passes on cultural values and traditions to future generations.

UNDERSTAND: Many participants expressed the importance of education in fostering understanding and empathy among visitors. Understanding also includes recognizing the contributions and resilience of Canadians of South Asian heritages, as well as their lived experiences and values from a newcomer perspective.

From Engagements:

"We want people to know about our historical contributions to Canada, including in agriculture, politics, and community-building, as well as the challenges faced by our ancestors in overcoming racial discrimination and fighting for social justice."

"The [museum] can become a powerful space that not only honors the past but also fosters greater understanding and unity among all South Asian communities in Canada."

Theme: To Represent

The museum should visibly acknowledge and celebrate the diverse Canadians of South Asian heritages, fostering a sense of pride and inclusivity. Likewise, creating a space that fosters respect and recognition of the contributions Canadians of South Asian heritages have made, their lived experience in the province, and their values, were noted as important considerations.

Participants felt the museum should create a space where the diverse communities of South Asian heritages are visibly represented and celebrated. It should showcase the cultural diversity within the Canadians South Asian diasporas, allowing individuals to see themselves reflected.

Theme: To Represent Continued

This could provide a space of acceptance, promoting belonging; offer a platform for communities to share stories, empowering them to preserve their heritage; and provide a voice to advocate for their cultural contributions.

Key Pillars

BELONGING: Participants hope for an environment where individuals feel accepted and connected. The space should allow for communities to come together to heal and support each other. By fostering an atmosphere of belonging, the museum can reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of unity.

*"South Asians
are visible but
misunderstood."*

- Survey respondent

EMPOWERMENT: Using the museum as a platform for Canadians of South Asian heritages to share their stories and engage with the broader community provides an opportunity for individuals to see themselves and their communities reflected, fostering a sense of pride and cultural identity. Some participants also expressed the importance of promoting the distinct cultural identities within the Canadian South Asian umbrella, ensuring all groups are recognized and celebrated while fostering community cohesion.

VOICE: Participants noted the importance of feeling heard in how cultures are represented, ensuring their voices are recognized and valued. This underscores the contributions and progress Canadians of South Asian heritages have made since coming to Canada, their lived experiences in the province, and their core values. Despite being visible, communities feel misunderstood, and want their contributions to be recognized. Participants also emphasized the importance of recognizing the achievements of underrepresented and marginalized groups within the Canadian South Asian diasporas, including women who have broken barriers and carved their own paths.

From Engagements:

"We wish to tell the stories of heroism that make our future generations proud."

"The Canadians of South Asian Heritages museum can become a powerful space that not only honors the past but also fosters greater understanding and unity among all South Asian communities in Canada."

Theme: To Preserve

Participants felt a key reason the museum should exist is to preserve the rich cultural heritages of Canadian South Asian communities in British Columbia.

"Preserve and honor the struggles and contributions of early South Asian settlers and the ongoing narratives of South Asian communities."

- Survey respondent

This preservation is essential for maintaining the cultural identity and legacy of Canadians of South Asian heritages. By honoring the past through traditional practices and **artifacts**, safeguarding the present through **living traditions**, and building the future through the **sharing of stories** and resilience, the museum could help preserve the rich history of Canadians of South Asian heritages for generations to come. Some communities with smaller populations in B.C. highlighted the challenges of preserving cultural aspects, such as language, especially when they are significantly distanced from their countries or origin.

From Engagements:

"People want to tell their stories and see their stories told."

Key Pillars

CULTURAL ARTIFACTS: Participants expressed the desire to preserve traditional clothing, folk dance, ornaments, dresses, pictures, jewelry, turbans, food, teas, and other physical items that bring South Asian cultures to life. This also includes showcasing monuments, local handicrafts, and the stories behind them.

LIVING TRADITIONS: Participants expressed the abundance of culture, languages, food, dress, customs, traditions that should be shared and appreciated. Participants felt this space could be a place where people can participate in and connect with cultural experiences – in particular, youth born in Canada with South Asian heritages roots. There was a strong emphasis on protecting and passing down South Asian heritages, traditions, languages, and histories for future generations.

Theme: To Preserve

SHARED STORIES: Participants noted the experience of preserving and celebrating cultural aspects, like language, is deeply tied to identity and reflects a shared history. The experience of migration, formed by different circumstances over time, impacts identity and is shaped by different generations. Preserving these stories through oral history helps future generations learn about their ancestors' journeys and experiences. Many expressed the resilience that is passed through to future generations in this process, which ensures cultural heritage is not lost.

From Engagements:

"Having physical items is vital to bringing the scale and depth of the culture to life."

Theme: To Celebrate

Celebration is a key aspect for the museum to express cultural heritage. By encouraging communities to **gather**, we can promote togetherness, increase **participation** outside of the Canadian South Asian diasporas, and foster an **active** space where cultures rooted in the Canadian South Asian diaspora are celebrated and sustained.

"We want the museum to create a space where culture can be celebrated and shared, fostering community pride and unity."

- Survey respondent

Key Pillars

PARTICIPATE: Communities expressed a desire for individuals outside of the Canadian South Asian diasporas to immerse themselves in the different traditions of South Asian heritages. Visitors and tourists are encouraged to partake in cultural celebrations and potential museum programs.

Theme: To Celebrate

GATHER: The museum could serve as a gathering place for Canadians of South Asian heritages to come together and celebrate their heritages, including community events, festivals, and cultural activities. Some participants noted the importance of having a space that fosters a sense of belonging, highlighting the value of a place they can share and make their own. Communities with smaller populations in B.C. noted the importance of having a place where people can connect easily with their culture, language, and traditions. These connections are often difficult to find for newcomers who are part of cultures with less visible presence in B.C., and a physical space that is open and welcoming to all was noted as a potential way to fill this gap.

ACTIVE: Participants expressed a desire for the space to serve as a community hub for programs and activities, as well as a place for active cultural expression through interactive exhibits and community-led events. This pillar also incorporates the desire for the museum to expand its reach beyond a physical location to become an active entity within communities.

From Engagements:

"People are needing and wanting a space to connect with each other, celebrate and come together."

Vision



Feedback that focused on what the museum should aspire to be was themed under 'vision'. This feedback will help to inform a vision statement that describes the long-term aspirations and goals of the museum.

Vision Themes Summary

► Plurality

- Community-led
- Intersectional
- Culturally Inclusive
- Intergenerational

► Engaging

- Diverse
- Interactive
- Innovative

Theme: Plurality

The theme of plurality emphasizes the importance of recognizing and celebrating the diverse cultural and individual identities that make up B.C. communities of Canadians of South Asian heritages, and a desire for the museum to represent the history, struggles, progress, values, and cultural practices of all aspects of the Canadian South Asian diaspora in British Columbia. This was noted as important to promote multiculturalism, eliminate discrimination, and reconnect Canadians with South Asian identities.

Through **communal** effort, **inclusive** spaces, and an understanding of the **intersectionality** of identities and **intergenerational** experiences, the museum should be a place that captures the diverse cultures and perspectives of Canadians of South Asian heritages.

Key Pillars

COMMUNITY-LED: Participants noted the collective effort of community-led initiatives to further benefit Canadians of South Asian heritages and foster strong inter-community collaboration. This pillar spoke to the idea that the space should be created by and for communities of Canadians of South Asian heritages. From exhibits and displays to active programming and utilization of the space, the form the museum takes should be driven by the people it represents.

INTERSECTIONAL: Participants highlighted the complexities of overlapping social identities, particularly in fostering unity among different cultural groups. It is important the museum recognizes the multifaceted nature of Canadian South Asian identities.

CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE: There was an emphasis on creating a space that embraces and respects the diversity of Canadians of South Asian heritages. This theme outlines a vision for the museum of inclusivity of the Canadian South Asian diasporas including cultures, walks of life, generations, and all the multi-faceted identities of many Canadians of South Asian heritages. This inclusivity work involves recognizing commonalities between Canada and other South Asian regions, while also acknowledging historical conflicts.

"We need to ensure there is fair representation of the diverse South Asian communities in B.C. without marginalizing smaller groups."

- Survey respondent

Theme: Plurality

Some participants noted the importance of **meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities** through the stages of museum planning, fostering solidarity and sustained respect for the land and its peoples.

"There is a need to respect Indigenous values when engaging in the work towards the museum and not losing sight of those important relationships in the process."

- Survey respondent

INTERGENERATIONAL: Participants highlighted the differing experiences across generations, with a notable focus on youth. While there is a hope for youth to play a pivotal role in bridging cultural gaps, participants expressed a desire for the space to connect youth with their heritages.

From Engagements:

"Inviting people to sit down and share a meal allows them to connect—not just as representatives of their culture or community, but as individuals."

"Youth don't see division within and between cultures. They have been exposed to a more open way of thinking and youth tend to break barriers because they are more accepting."

Theme: Engaging

Participants expressed a desire to see a museum that captivates and inspires all visitors within and outside the Canadian South Asian diaspora through dynamic experiences. The museum should create an experience that actively involves those visiting or using the space.

By focusing on **diversity**, and ensuring the space is **interactive**, constantly evolving, and **innovative**, the museum should be a space that encourages exploration and discovery.

Theme: Engaging

Key Pillars

DIVERSE: Participants emphasized a wide range of perspectives and experiences that need to be well represented. The museum should have curated exhibits and programs highlighting diversity. One individual emphasized the importance of designing the museum with accessibility in mind, noting that diversity should also reflect an inclusive environment that accommodates all visitors, including those who are differently abled.

"We need to find a way in which the broader population would connect with the museum."

- Survey respondent

INTERACTIVE: The museum should create a hands-on experience engaging visitors in meaningful ways and an opportunity to learn through direct involvement.

INNOVATIVE: Participants expressed the importance of forward-thinking approaches to offer unique and memorable experiences, ideally paving the way for this museum to become a reality.

From Engagements:

"It needs to be a living and breathing thing, constantly evolving."

"It's crucial to remember that culture is always evolving, and it's impossible to get everything right all the time. Embrace the dynamic nature of culture by recognizing opportunities to showcase new aspects and allowing the space to adapt as the environment changes. Being comfortable with not pleasing everyone immediately is key."



Guidance From Subject Matter Experts

As part of the targeted engagement, subject matter experts from museums and representatives at academic institutions were engaged to gather insights on best practices, lessons learned, and current thought leadership that focused on the following topics:

- **Representing diverse cultures and perspectives in a museum context;**
- **Respectfully engaging diverse communities in the development and curation of a museum space; and**
- **Enhancing representation of Canadian culture influenced by South Asian heritages in the province.**

Representing diverse cultures and perspectives in museum contexts

When asked about best practice in representing diverse cultures and perspectives in museum contexts, museum experts and academics noted the challenges inherent in representing the rich mix of geographies, ethnicities, religions, and cultures contained within the Canadian South Asian diasporas. Participants noted the need for the museum to address this complexity by being intentional in their approach, working to balance perspectives, creating a sense of welcome, and representing the rich diversity of cultures in dynamic ways.

Create Balance:

Participants noted the importance of the museum taking an active role in balancing the representative voices and perspectives by intentionally creating space for lesser heard voices and perspectives. Shared lived experiences like those related to immigration or exodus from a home country, and topics like art and cultural celebrations were noted as providing common threads through which to present varied perspectives in a balanced way.

Reflect and Welcome:

Experts highlighted that in the process of locating, naming, curating, and creating content for a museum, it is important to consider those that the space is intended to serve. If the space is primarily being created to serve Canadians of South Asian heritages, then the location should be accessible and its name reflective and welcoming to all who identify with the Canadian South Asian diaspora. Participants cautioned that while the term 'South Asian' is used widely, it is a geographical term that can be divisive and as such, it may or may not be appropriate in this situation. As the purpose of a museum is to have people visit it, the name and location represent important decisions that will impact the future vitality and viability of the space.

Think Differently:

Participants noted that museums are evolving from static displays to more experiential and participatory exhibits. They highlighted the opportunities this shift presents for creating a museum that reflects a rich diversity of cultures and engages communities across the province. Participants noted the goal of a museum, particularly one representing a Canadian South Asian diaspora in British Columbia, is not to be the ultimate representation of all cultures, but rather to create space for different aspects of different cultures to be showcased and represented over time. This can take the form of rotating special exhibitions, community-curated exhibitions, and art exhibitions. Participants also noted the potential for living, active representations of culture like celebrations, performances, and storytelling. It was noted the strength of stretching beyond a brick-and-mortar location to consider other venues like schools, community events, and walking tours. Digital footprints were also commonly mentioned to expand reach and engage communities. It was also highlighted that modern museums can serve as vibrant community gathering spaces and offer more dynamic, engaging experiences beyond the traditional history museum model.

Respectfully engaging diverse communities in the development and curation of a museum space

When asked about best practice in respectfully engaging with diverse communities in the development and curation of the space, museum experts and academics noted relationships as the primary success factor.

Experts noted the need to approach relationships from a long-term perspective, to create space and safety for open discussions to occur, and to provide the support and resources necessary to build strong volunteer and business relationships that will become the foundation of a successful museum.





Establish Long-Term Community Connections:

Partnerships with local organizations were noted as important for success. Local art communities, universities, school districts, and cultural organizations were all mentioned as potentially valuable organizations for the museum to establish relationships with. The importance of being present within the communities being served and allowing trust to develop over time were highlighted as key factors for success.

Create Open Discussion:

Participants emphasized the need to be intentional with conversations. This included being thoughtful and transparent about who is included in discussions to ensure diverse voices are represented. Likewise, this approach allows community members to flag concerns or note tensions beforehand so they can be acknowledged and proactively addressed. Participants also noted that awareness of potential biases and clear expectations regarding open mindedness and respectful dialogue is beneficial in supporting those in advisory roles to have effective discussions. Participants urged museum representatives not to shy away from difficult topics or conversations (e.g. religion, cultural tensions etc.), but rather to accept the challenge and use them as opportunities to build trust and develop inclusive solutions.

Provide Support:

Participants noted that engaging respectfully involves ongoing support for established government commitments, including access to necessary resources to promote long-term sustainability. Examples such as assistance in creating business cases, supporting the development of funding applications, and resources to help with establishing charitable status for the museum were all suggested.

Enhancing representation of Canadian South Asian cultures and communities in the province

When asked about enhancing representation of Canadian South Asian cultures and communities in the province, museum experts and academic participants noted that while the concept of a museum representing Canadians of South Asian heritages in B.C. is new, and enhancing the representation of such a broad diaspora presents unique challenges, there is significant expertise and examples of successful efforts of similar scope to draw from. They noted the importance of conveying the historical and political contexts that are integral to cultures and communities.

Tap Into Existing Expertise:

Participants noted the breadth of expertise available to assist in these efforts. Many participants noted the desire to continue to be involved in the development of the concept of a Canadians of South Asian heritages museum, noting that this is the first time such an effort has been made in Canada. Participants also noted multiple examples of diaspora and mobility-engaged museums whose models may be instructive. This included:

- **Basque Museum and Cultural Centre – Boise, Idaho**
- **Haitian American Museum of Chicago - Chicago, Illinois**
- **Red Star Line Emigration Museum – Antwerp, Belgium**
- **Canadian Museum for Human Rights – Winnipeg, Manitoba**
- **Aga Khan Museum – Toronto, Ontario**

Be Aware of Global and Historical Context:

In this pillar, participants emphasized that an important consideration in enhancing representation of cultures and communities is acknowledging the role of historical, global and local contexts in current community dynamics. Representing the role of discriminatory immigration policies and other government actions in the lived experience of Canadians of South Asian heritages was noted as a key consideration. Current socio-political dynamics at global and local levels were also noted as something to be aware of when building engagement plans, and in understanding how different communities may wish to be represented within the museum.





Name

The temporary working name "Canadians of South Asian Heritages Museum" is a placeholder for this initiative until an official name can be determined by the communities who will shape and define the space.

Although there was no clear consensus on the name of the museum, participants noted the importance of choosing a name carefully. Many noted the name of the space will play an important role in making people feel welcome to visit and participate, and so it must be reflective of all those the space is designed to serve.

Several considerations were raised regarding a potential name for the space, particularly as it relates to recognizing both the diversity and unity of cultures falling within the Canadian South Asian diasporas. Considerations included:

Use of the term South Asian

- **'South Asian' can be a unifying term and it can be a divisive term.** The terms 'South Asian' or 'South Asian Canadian' share the virtues and the shortcomings of any broad category: these categories reveal as much as they obscure.
- **The term 'South Asian' is widely used, but this may be changing with a growing shift towards language that is community-defined or rooted in self-identification. Some communities view this term as not representative or respectful.** Additionally, it may be too broad and unclear a term to create a sense of belonging and welcome for everyone in B.C.
- **At the same time, some participants suggested names that explicitly referenced South Asia or its communities,** such as *South Asian Heritage Museum, South Asian Communities Museum, South Asian Tapestry Museum, and South Asian Heritage Museum of Canada.*

Inclusive Names

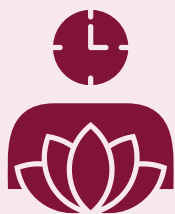
- Whatever name is chosen, it should be **reflective and inclusive of all Canadian South Asian diasporic communities in B.C. – and not potentially polarizing or divisive –** and should **avoid religious terms** or connotations.
- Names that emphasize **multi-culturalism, unity, and resilience** should be considered.
- **A non-English name may be appropriate** and could be chosen to reflect concepts of oneness, home, heritage, story, etc.

Inclusive Names Continued

- Specific suggestions included names like *Multicultural Museum*, *Unity in Diversity Museum*, and *Heritage Mosaic Museum* to **emphasize inclusivity and celebrate the diversity of South Asian cultures**.
- Other names like *Voices of the Margins*, *The Healing Centre*, and *Journey of Resilience* were suggested to emphasize **storytelling** and **community connection**.
- Names such as *Roots & Resilience Museum*, *Legacy of South Asia*, and *Heritage Mosaic Museum* were suggested as an opportunity for the space to emphasize **pride in cultural heritage and history**.

Focused Names

- Some name suggestions focused on specific communities or identities, others suggested it **could include the name of a prominent Canadian of South Asian heritage**.
- Some suggested the name could focus on **specific communities** like *Tamil Heritage Centre* or *Kannada Heritage Centre*.
- Other suggestions focused on **spiritual or symbolic names** including *Darshan Museum*, *Sanskaar Centre*, and *Vishvaa Centre for South Asians*.
- Still, other suggestions pointed to **including the location of the museum in the name**, such as the *Surrey South Asian Cultural Museum*.



While it is difficult to identify a single name from the feedback provided, the common direction provided by participants was to take the time needed to create a name that reflects the purpose of the space and that resonates widely with those it will serve. More engagement is likely needed and may best be undertaken by the organization established to govern the new museum.



Location

The selection of the museum's location is closely tied to its core purpose. If the goal is to strengthen connections among Canadians of South Asian heritages, the site should be easily accessible to community members and suitable for hosting gatherings and cultural events. If the primary aim is to introduce Canadian South Asian cultures to broader audiences, including visitors and those outside these heritages, a location within a high traffic or tourist-oriented area may be more efficient. Participants also emphasized the importance of acknowledging indigenous history and ensuring that the location reflects respect for First Nation's rights and traditional territories. Participants noted several other considerations related to location including:

Moving Beyond Brick-and-Mortar Locations

Participants, particularly museum experts, emphasized the importance of thinking about location beyond simply a brick-and-mortar building. Leveraging digital tools, participating in community events, and extending displays and performances into other community locations, e.g., art galleries and schools, were noted as ways to expand the reach of the space.

Accessibility

Participants noted physical accessibility considerations including proximity to public transit, proximity to major centres, and parking availability as important. Locating the museum near existing cultural or religious centres may support accessibility of the space, while fostering multicultural exchanges and enhancing community involvement.

Matching Location to Purpose

Considerations around aligning purpose and location focused on whether the space is intended primarily as a tourist or visitor destination, a community gathering place for members of the Canadian South Asian diaspora, or a combination of both.

If the location is being designed to serve members of the Canadian South Asian diaspora, then participants noted the importance of remaining aware of how location impacts accessibility for lesser-heard voices. Feedback included being cautious about locating the museum in a place where there are one or two dominant demographics, as this decision may have unintended consequences of dissuading some communities from visiting/using the space. Others suggested locations close to areas with greater populations of individuals of South Asian heritages. Other input included considering a hub-and-spoke model to centralize the space, while creating access points for communities across the province.

If the space is designed to educate other Canadians about South Asian cultures and heritages, then accessibility became a question of centrality and access for visitors and tourists. Considerations such as choosing a tourism destination that is already attractive to visitors and choosing a central hub that is heavily trafficked and able to draw a broad audience were mentioned as important.

Specific Location Suggestions

Two cities were frequently noted by participants as potential locations for the museum.

1

Surrey

Surrey was the most suggested location for the museum. Those who favoured this location noted the high number of Canadians of South Asian heritages who live and work in Surrey, as well as the number of people that travel to Surrey to shop for South Asian groceries, cuisine, and clothing.

Some participants mentioned that Surrey is a more convenient access point for surrounding cities such as Burnaby, Coquitlam and Abbotsford, than downtown Vancouver. Additionally, it was acknowledged that Surrey would offer a greater opportunity to find the necessary land required to build a museum at a lesser cost, compared to downtown Vancouver.

2

Vancouver

Downtown Vancouver was the second most identified location for the museum due to its role as the epicentre for tourism in British Columbia, and in particular for individuals arriving via cruise ships. If a goal of the museum is to educate Canadians and international visitors about Canadian South Asian heritages in B.C., then downtown Vancouver was seen as the ideal location. Museums in other jurisdictions, such as Toronto, Ontario, are positioned in the downtown core to capitalize on the volume of traffic and tourists. Some participants did raise concerns about downtown Vancouver as a permanent location due to travel time, cost of parking, and accessibility via transit. Others mentioned that selecting Surrey as the location may feel isolating for non-South Asian heritage community members.

Other Locations

Several cities were mentioned as potential locations for the museum, including:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Burnaby | 3. Langley | 5. Victoria |
| 2. Abbotsford | 4. Delta | 6. Coquitlam |
| | | 7. New Westminster |

Conclusion

The feedback gathered through this engagement process has provided valuable insights into the vision for a museum which will celebrate the contributions of Canadians of South Asian heritages in B.C. Participants shared a range of perspectives on the museum's purpose and vision, highlighting themes of education, representation, preservation, celebration, plurality, and engagement.

Overall, participants noted the desire for the museum to go beyond traditional formats to create a vibrant place where people can celebrate and experience Canadian South Asian cultures and heritages. Further, participants note the museum should be a place where people of Canadian South Asian heritages can go to connect with their own culture and communities. There was a strong desire to create a space that actively fosters and supports understanding of and inclusivity for the multi-faceted identities of the many Canadians of South Asian heritages.

Key Considerations Moving Forward

Participants raised several key considerations that should be considered when moving ahead with the planning for and creation of a new museum. These considerations may form the basis for lines of inquiry in future engagement phases.

- 1. It is important for the museum to acknowledge and address the history of discrimination that Canadians of South Asian heritages have experienced in the province.** Discriminatory laws and immigration policies, racism, and social injustices have, and continue to be, part of the experience of people of Canadian South Asian heritages in the province. The space must seek to include an honest portrayal of these struggles and should work to promote multi-cultural and anti-racist perspectives.
- 2. Youth of Canadian South Asian heritages are an important audience and voice in the conversation about the museum.** Feedback related to education and preservation themes were linked in part to educating youth of South Asian heritages about their culture, and preserving language, traditions, and history for future generations. This preservation was noted as especially important for youth growing up in Canada who may not have strong ties to their cultures. Youth were also noted as an important voice in the conversation, as they play an increasingly important role in shaping the political, economic and cultural landscape in the province and may be able to bridge gaps and address historical social issues in new and meaningful ways in the future.

3. **Ensure lesser-represented communities are included and represented.** The term 'South Asian' includes a wide range of ethnicities, cultures and religions. Communities like the Indo-Fijian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani communities are relatively small in size in B.C. and therefore have less presence in political and social dialogue in the province. It will be important to ensure these communities have a voice and presence in the museum because they can significantly benefit from a space that fosters a sense of belonging that is often missing for newcomers and those belonging to lesser-represented groups.
4. **Design the museum to be dynamic to culture and context.** The cultural diaspora that the space seeks to represent is dynamic and ever-changing. The space should be flexible and able to represent these changing dynamics. Likewise, the purpose of a museum is not to be the ultimate representation of every culture, but rather to represent different aspects of different cultures over time and in different ways. A focus on dynamic representations of Canadian South Asian heritages will provide freedom and flexibility to showcase varied aspects and to adapt over time as the cultural landscape evolves and changes.

It is important to recognize that this engagement is a starting point, intended to be generative in gathering perspectives from communities about what they want this museum to be, and to better understand how to work with these communities to create that space.

Additional work will be required to inform any future decisions regarding the vision, mission, name, and location of the museum.

Ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the communities represented through this initiative will be critical as the initiative progresses.



Appendix A: Grant Recipients

Organization	
1.	1277490 BC LTD
2.	Abbotsford Cultural Centre (DBA The Reach Gallery Museum)
3.	Amar Wellness Inc
4.	Arts BC Arts Service Society
5.	Bangladesh Canada Cultural Association in Victoria (BCCAV)
6.	BC Federation of Labour
7.	BC-India Business Network
8.	Belonging Matters Consulting (3 grants received)
9.	Culture Chats Association BC
10.	DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society/Surrey Local Immigration Partnership
11.	Do Not Touch Studio Inc.
12.	Dori Events and Catering
13.	Engaged Communities Canada Society
14.	Familogue Education Society
15.	India Cultural Association of Vancouver
16.	Inner Vision Productions Inc. (5 grants received)
17.	Kelowna Hindu Cultural Society
18.	Khalsa Diwan Society
19.	Khalsa Secondary School
20.	KRK TRUCKING LTD
21.	Let Her Talk
22.	Marathi Society of B.C
23.	Middlepeace Clinical Counselling Society (2)

Organization	
24.	Moving Forward Family Services
25.	Museum Liberation Force
26.	Nadeem Zia Consulting Inc.
27.	Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships (NEVR) Society
28.	PICS
29.	Poetic Justice Foundation
30.	Punjabi Market Collective Society
31.	Rira Janitorial Services And Building Maintenance Inc.
32.	SACH South Asian Community Hub Society (2 grants received)
33.	Sanjh Foundation
34.	SATNAM Education Society of BC (2 grants received)
35.	Scout Zoo Ventures Inc.
36.	Sher Vancouver
37.	Skeena Diversity Society
38.	Skyrocket Digital Inc
39.	Solid State Community Industries Genconnect
40.	South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
41.	Surrey Board of Trade
42.	Surrey Local Immigration Partnership
43.	The South Asian Collective Society (2 grants received)
44.	VanCitySingh Productions LTD. (4 grants received)
45.	VM's Art of Installation LTD.
46.	Worldwide Gypsum Supplier Ltd

Appendix B:

Participating Community Organizations, Museums and Academic Institutions

	Organization	Organization Type
1.	Afghan National Cultural Society	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
2.	Arya Samaj Educational and Cultural Society of BC	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
3.	BongMilanti	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
4.	Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
5.	Fijian Association of Canada	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
6.	Fruiticana	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
7.	Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
8.	Indo-Fijian Cultural Society of BC	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
9.	Island Tuskers Sports and Recreation Club	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
10.	Itaukei cultural society of BC	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
11.	Multicultural and Immigrant Services Association of North Vancouver Island	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
12.	Shia Ismaili Muslim Community of BC	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
13.	Skeena Diversity Society	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
14.	Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre	<i>Community-affiliated organization</i>
15.	Chinese Canadian Museum (CEO)	<i>Museum</i>
16.	Chinese Canadian Museum (Board Chair)	<i>Museum</i>
17.	Okanagan Heritage Museum	<i>Museum</i>
18.	Kamloops Museum and Archives	<i>Museum</i>
19.	Royal Ontario Museum - Friends of South Asia	<i>Museum</i>
20.	Aga Khan Museum	<i>Museum</i>
21.	Kwantlen Polytechnic University - Asian Studies	<i>Academic Institution</i>
22.	AMS Jain Students Association	<i>Academic Institution</i>
23.	Western University	<i>Academic Institution</i>
24.	Department of Asian Studies, UBC	<i>Academic Institution</i>
25.	Department of History, UVic	<i>Academic Institution</i>



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