

on the table.

AN INVITATION FROM **van**coover
foundation

Community Reflections & Insights





What's
on your
mind?

#onthetableBC

Front Cover:

Photo from the *On the Table* event hosted by Joleen Mitton
at the Skwachàys Lodge in Vancouver, BC.

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Introduction

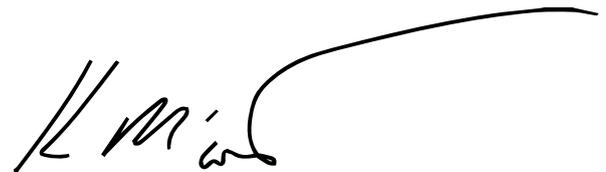
In 2017 Vancouver Foundation released a report on social isolation titled *Connect & Engage*. Through this research, we learned that people are yearning for connection; specifically offline and face-to-face.

We closed that report with a call to action for each of us to do more to create a sense of welcome and belonging in our communities. This year, to mark our 75th anniversary, we resolved to step up and do our part. We wanted a celebration that would be about bringing people together — a natural way to live our values of being “community inspired”. We were also interested in experimenting with this technique of crowdsourcing what’s on people’s minds in a very authentic way.

Social isolation is a complex issue to solve, but building social connections can be straightforward. It’s as simple as getting together with people. Instead of hosting a community event ourselves, we asked people to step up and host their own. This subtle

shift made a big difference. Not only were we able to have thousands more people connecting with one another across the province, but it also allowed each host to tailor the event to their community and their interests. We asked that there be some sort of food served. It could be anything from a simple snack to a three-course meal — that was completely up to the host. Finally, and most importantly, we asked hosts across BC, “What’s on your mind?” This simple, open question was a spark that ignited hundreds of conversations in every corner of the province. Through this platform of gathering, sharing food, and just talking, something special happened.

We’re excited to share our learnings and insights with you here.



Kevin McCort
CEO of Vancouver Foundation





“

We are looking for the pulse of the community through these conversations

”

— Kevin McCort

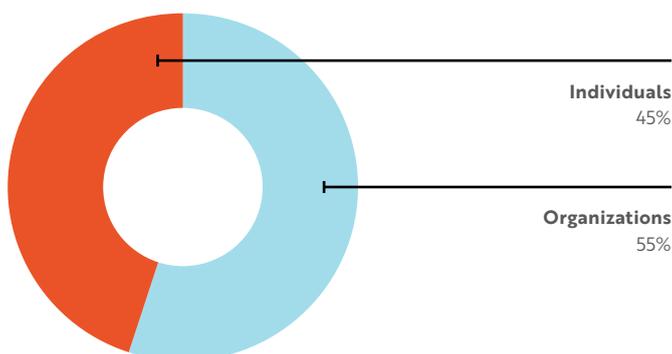
Pulse of the Community

Through *On the Table*, we've created a catalyst and platform for people across the province to connect within their own communities. It was both exciting and inspiring to see such a diversity of ages, sectors, and backgrounds enthusiastic to engage and host.

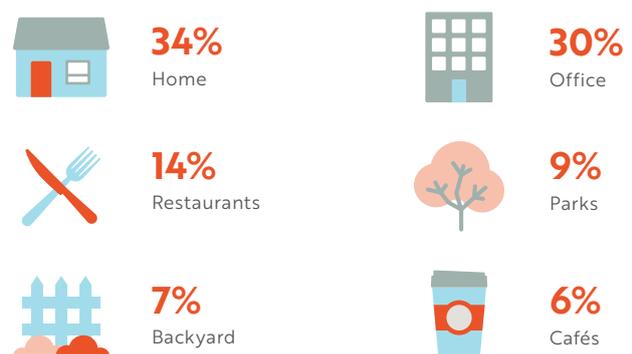


Total number of *On the Table* events within each BC region

Types of Hosts



Common Venues

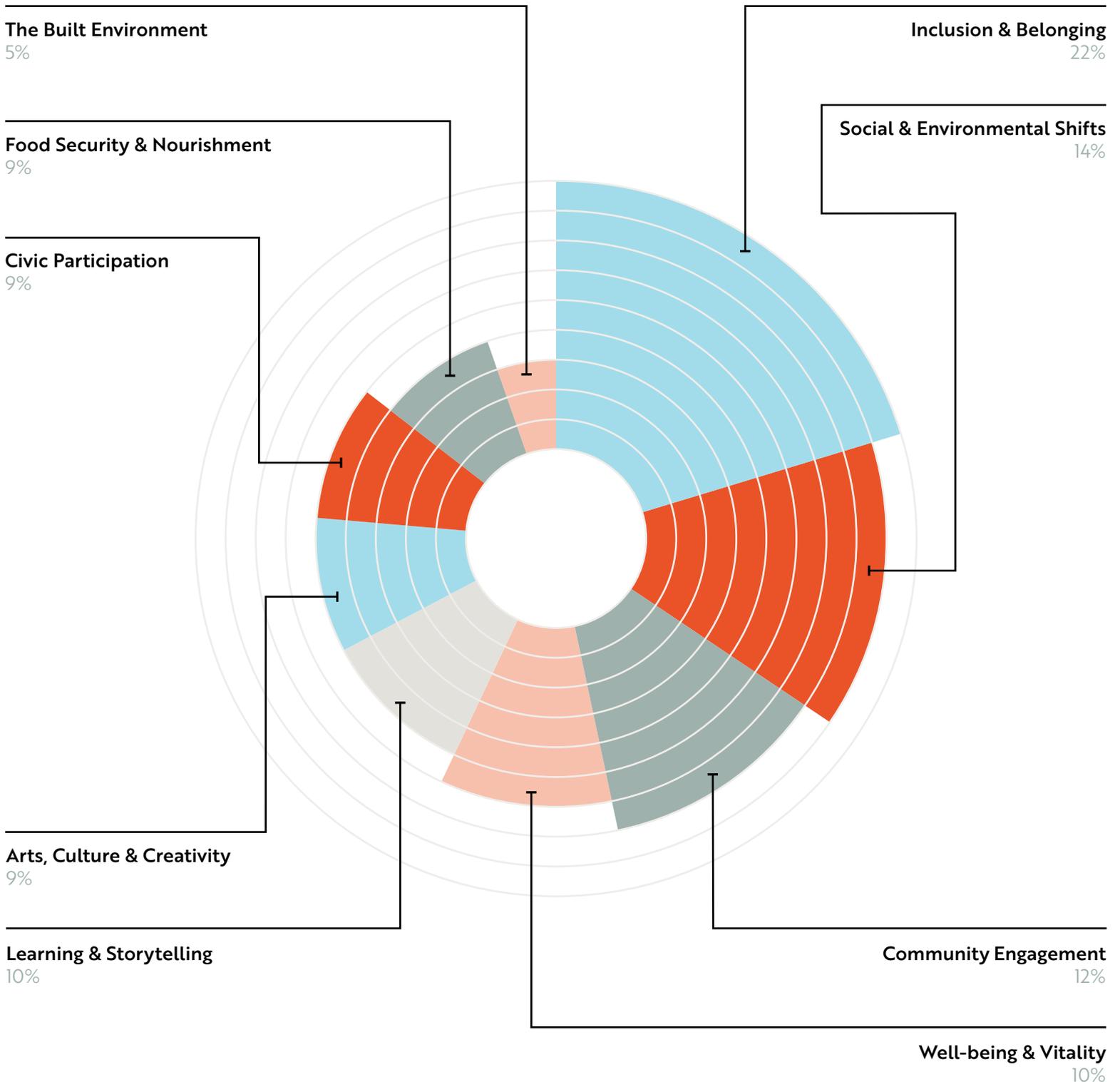




Photos from *On the Table* events that took place across BC.

Voice of the Community

When British Columbians were asked the question, “What’s on your mind?” all sorts of conversations surfaced. We asked hosts to tell us what they talked about so we could share the topics with you. Here are some highlights.



Inclusion & Belonging

Connecting with Youth Refugees
 Women in Philanthropy
 Reconciliation
 Meeting Your Neighbours
 Issues Impacting Seniors

Social & Environmental Shifts

#Metoo
 Barriers to Employment
 Cross-sector Collaboration
 Survival of Bees
 Cannabis Legalization

Community Engagement

Happy Neighbourhoods
 Co-op Community
 Nature and Community
 Neighbours on Purpose
 Diversity and Community

Well-being & Vitality

Hearing Loss
 Living in Balance
 Busy People Connecting
 What Matters to Seniors
 Growing a Healthy Culture

Learning & Storytelling

Polarizing Viewpoints
 Why Newspapers Matter
 Public vs Private School
 Honouring Legacy
 Community Journalism

Arts, Culture & Creativity

Arts & Culture in the Downtown Eastside
 Fringe Theatre
 Mental Health & Art
 Does it Belong in a Museum?
 Indigenous Fashion

Civic Participation

What Affects You in YVR
 This Year at Kitchener
 Reflection Cafe
 Is Democracy in Trouble?
 Indie Commercial Catalysts

Food Security & Nourishment

Cooking Lessons for Teens
 Local Food Systems
 Food Systems on the Coast
 Sustainable Food & Farming
 Harvesting & Wildcrafting

The Built Environment

Accessible Travel
 Affordable Housing
 Designing for Disabilities
 Family-Friendly Workspaces
 Sustainable Transportation

“

When you ask people about loneliness and isolation, they are going to come up with creative solutions. Let's treat these solutions like public goods and make them accessible.

”

— Kevin McCort

Featured Host Reflections

The hosts who stepped up to convene their own events across the province became community catalysts for creating the sense of welcome and belonging we hoped for.

Some were seasoned conveners, while others were hosting for the very first time. We heard from a variety of hosts that *On the Table* gave them the excuse they needed to initiate their gathering. Others said it gave them a nice reminder to make it happen. We followed a few of the hosts on their journey – before, during and after their events – to learn from and understand their experiences hosting an *On the Table* for the first time.

Curry, beer & equity.

Sarah White COO & Co-Founder of Fairware

Through *On the Table*, Sarah and her colleagues found a great framework for constructive conversation about equity. They felt the event provided a structure to create something that an individual may not have been able to do by themselves, while also providing another opportunity for Sarah to apply her passions for social justice and collaboration in a community setting.





Tabouleh, falafel & barriers to employment.

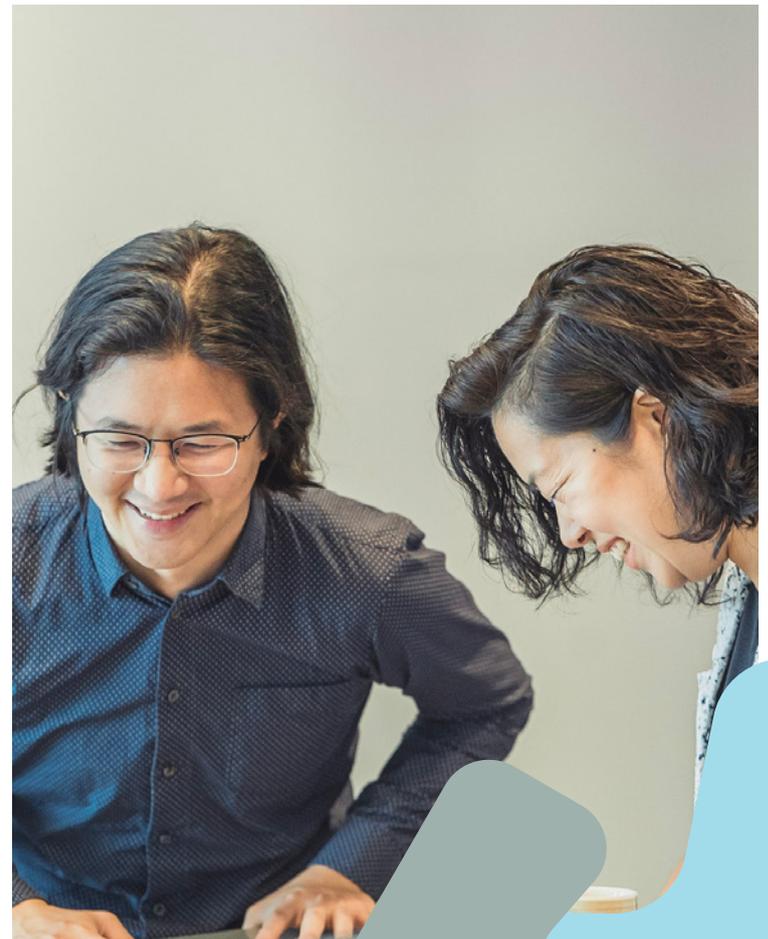
Craig Hikida
VP of Donor Services
at Vancouver Foundation

On the Table provided Craig an opportunity to host multiple events. He hosted one in his home and another through his workplace, where he asked his guests to bring their own networks. Instead of pre-selecting a topic for the event as a whole, guests were invited to choose their own topics of discussion. Craig felt that *On the Table* created a unique opportunity for increasing organizational reach by better understanding the important relationships in employees' lives.

Hot pot, plum drink & growing up 'multicultural'.

Kevin Huang
Executive Director
of Hua Foundation

Kevin used *On the Table* as an outlet for his passion of building relationships over food. His take-away was understanding the importance of taking things slower — believing that sharing moments of communion will lead to unique experiences. Kevin would like to see an ongoing conversation where people can continue to talk about issues and take action together.



Seasonal classics, wine & honouring legacy.

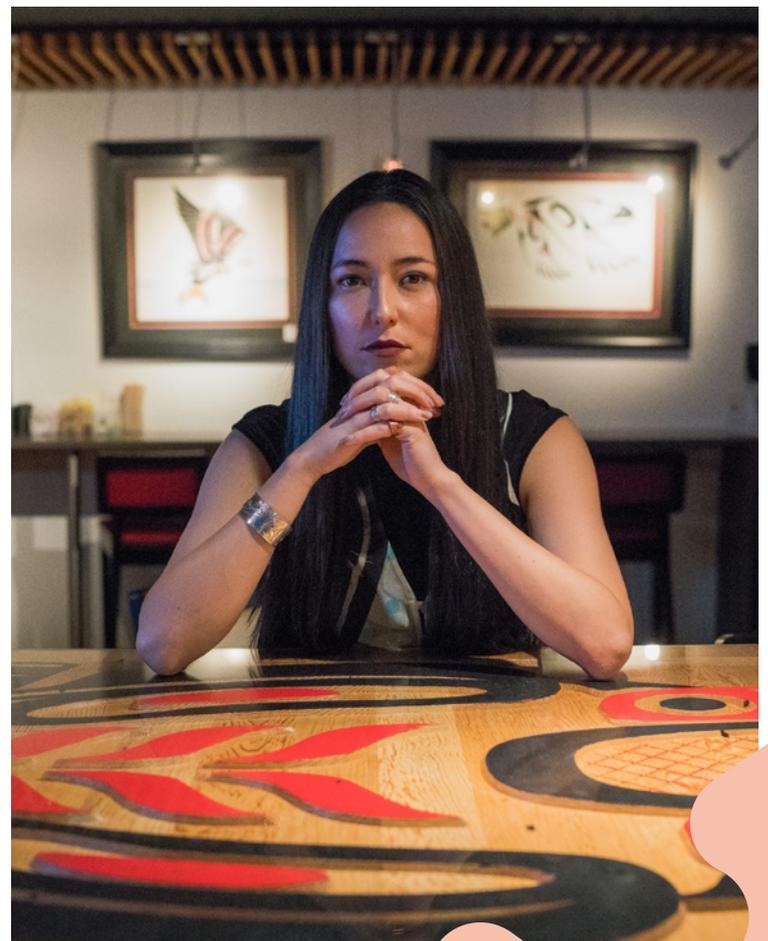
Karri Schuermans Queen Bee of Chambar Restaurant

Karri hosted an *On the Table* event to explore the idea of acknowledging those who have done amazing work in their communities. As she puts it, "most of the people who do the greatest work are quite humble and often go unrecognized". She found value in the way *On the Table's* format encouraged people to attend an event alone and outside of their own circle. It allowed strangers to come together in a safe space around a topic of personal interest.

Bannock, tea & Indigenous fashion.

Joleen Mitton Producer of Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week

Joleen hosted a talk on Indigenous fashion. Having a background in community support work, she came to the table with experience in being a community catalyst. After hosting her first *On the Table* event, Joleen would recommend the experience to anyone with a story to tell and a cause to pursue.



Farm fresh pizza, beer & food systems on the coast.

Roo Miller-Petit: Tasting Room Manager of Persephone Brewing.

Roo and the Persephone Brewing Company immediately found two of their three key values to be reflected in *On the Table*: Community Connectedness and Developing Partnerships. Their third value, Local Agriculture, was the central theme of their event. Roo and his peers gained new insight surrounding agricultural efficiency through collaborative conversations with food advocates, farmers, and government representatives.

Though we only had a chance to follow a few hosts throughout their experience, we are grateful to the hundreds of hosts who opened their lunchrooms, living rooms or met at their favourite park or coffee shop to gather people together for a meaningful conversation.



Want to learn more?

Visit the *On the Table* youtube page to watch a short featurette on each of these hosts.



Photos from *On the Table* events that took place across BC.



Community Reflections

From dinners held in restaurants to coworkers gathering in the lunchroom, events came together in all forms and settings. We followed up these events with a survey for both hosts and guests. Here is a snapshot of what we heard.

“We were thrilled to bring together an interesting, eclectic group of individuals who felt comfortable enough in a warm, safe space to share their feelings, experiences and insights on the difficult topic of isolation and what it meant to them.”

- Survey Respondent

“Food is something we all consume and share. It is a basic need and somehow when you bring people together over food — especially when you offer to cook something or make something or share a dish from a restaurant you like and there is a story behind it — these food gatherings bring the best out of people. They are more relaxed than when you are meeting in a more formal environment.”

- Mohamed Ehab,
Co-founder of Changemakers Vancouver,
CBC Interview

On the Table was a great reason for connection and conversation to happen and the topics people discussed will have ripple effects. Many participants reported that they were inspired to take action and continue these interactions past their events.

98%

of hosts said that *On The Table* provided an opportunity to host a conversation that wouldn't have happened otherwise

95%

of hosts would host an event again

72%

of guests met someone new that they want to stay in contact with after the event

63%

of guests would consider hosting an event of their own

“

We know one meal isn't going to solve loneliness, but the ideas that we pick up, the ideas that people share — that's what we are keen on.

”

— Kevin McCort

Learnings & Insights

Being face-to-face is important.

In this digital age, we are immersed in technology in all aspects of our lives. These tools can help connect us, but, there's something important about face-to-face interactions which make all the difference. Technology cannot replace the meaningful communication that happens in a common space, over shared food. Through this human experience, people are brought together in a unique, interesting, and meaningful way.

Anybody can be a catalyst for connection.

There is no mould to define the people who step up in their community to host an *On the Table*. Some of this year's hosts were seasoned conveners, but most were individuals who simply had something on their mind they wanted to talk about. It's a powerful reminder that all of us can do a little something to make our communities more welcoming for everyone.

We all benefit from a little nudge.

We learned that *On the Table* is more than a convenient platform to support connection, it is also a reminder — a little nudge — to gather people together to make conversations happen. We all have a hard time making connections due to the hectic pace of life. By planning a specific date to convene, people had an opportunity to dedicate time to what they wished for more often.

Image Below:
Craig Hikida, VP of Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation, Kevin McCort, CEO of Vancouver Foundation, Sheryl MacKay, Host of *North by Northwest*, CBC



When we share what's on our mind, we find others who feel the same.

By choosing a topic to start the conversation, hosts had the opportunity to reflect on what really matters to them. This gave them a reason to convene while giving their guests something to think about. It instantly created a focus for everyone to converse, debate, and find common ground. Most of the issues discussed wouldn't be resolved over one meal, but a sense of connection emerged — inspiring many hosts and guests to go beyond the table and continue a conversation.

Conversation unites us.

Our Connect & Engage research highlighted that certain groups are feeling disconnected more-so than others. Perhaps that's not surprising at a time when so many people feel our world is increasingly divided. *On the Table* reminded us of the importance of focusing on the things that unite us. Inclusivity, social responsibility, happiness, community engagement, and well-being were reoccurring themes at this year's events. Bringing people together, in person and on issues we all care about, can help to foster connections and a shared experience to build from.



Where Do We Go From Here?

On the Table has provided us with many valuable insights and ideas moving forward. British Columbia is home to a tapestry of cultures, personalities, and passions.

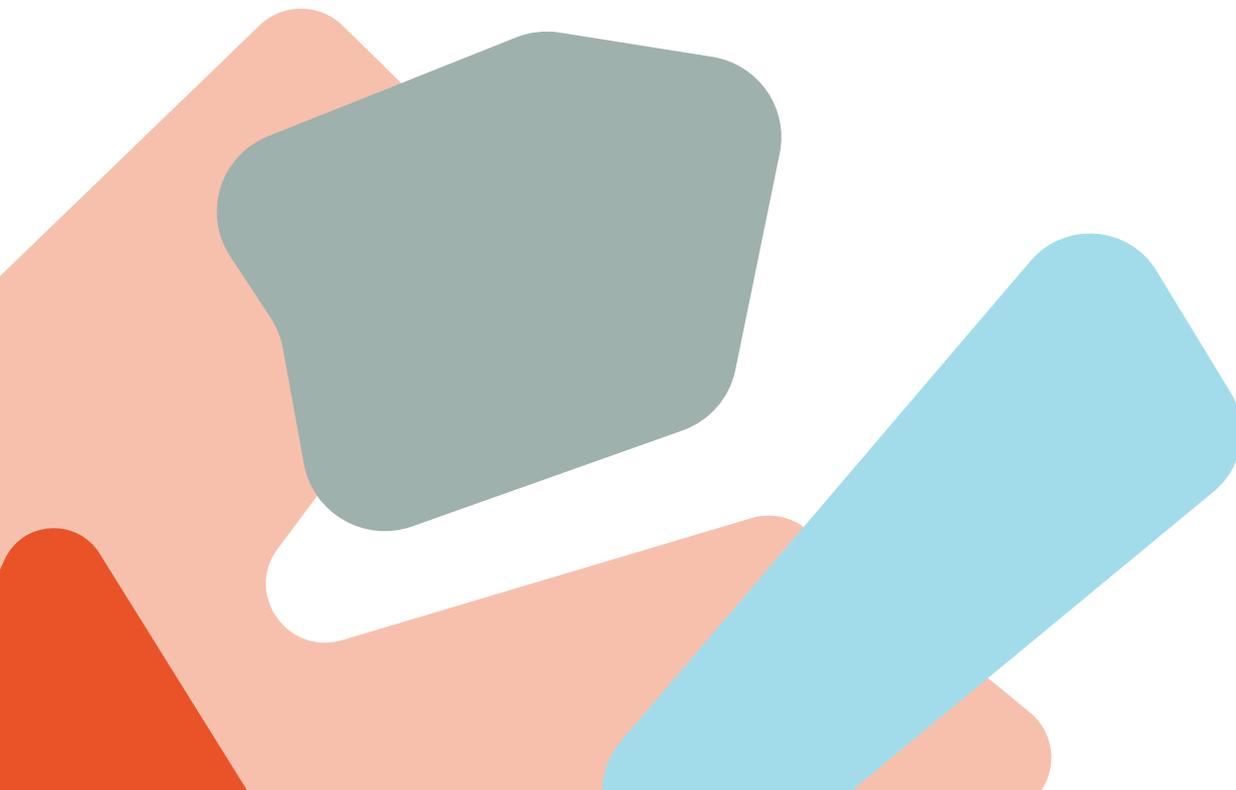
On the Table was a perfect way to celebrate our milestone 75th anniversary. It gave us another chance to connect with, and listen to, communities around BC. It brought together diverse people and conversations. It also revealed a fascinating snapshot of what's on people's minds right now.

Through all the conversations we had, and the feedback we've received, we heard that *On the Table* hit the mark. People believe there is an important role for Vancouver Foundation to play in offering this platform for getting together face to face, sharing food, and talking about what matters most.

With your encouragement, we'd like to do it again. In the future, we hope to expand our circle even wider into more communities, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and any other spaces where people come together.

On the Table is not about expecting to end social isolation, or solving the big issues of our time over one conversation. It's about taking the time to do something simple, but meaningful — extending an invitation to friends, coworkers, family, and strangers to come together and share. Through this new platform for gathering, we experience how easy it can be to connect and engage.

Please visit onthetablebc.com to stay in the loop.





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