

BCSPI

British Columbia
Social Procurement Initiative

2021 & 2022

PURCHASING POWER FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
5-PART SPEAKER SERIES



Acknowledgements

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Cover photo by Thomas Nowaczynski, for BC Farmer's Markets Trail.

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INTRODUCTION

Every purchase has an economic, environmental, cultural and social impact. [British Columbia Social Procurement Initiative](#) (BCSPI) supports local governments, institutions and other public purchasers to implement social procurement policies and frameworks that maximize their existing budgets for increased social and environmental value in their communities.

The Purchasing Power series features leaders who are putting the principles of a social value marketplace into action, and explores how local governments and institutions can use purchasing power to address the issues that are growing community priorities.

During the Winter of 2021-2022, BCSPI hosted the first five events in the Purchasing Power series. We asked, how can social procurement:

- **Engage Indigenous businesses**
- **Support local economies**
- **Increase food security**
- **Support diversity and inclusion, and**
- **Address climate change**

This summary reviews the overarching themes shared in the 2021-2022 Purchasing Power events, along with specific learnings and actionable steps from each of the topics discussed.

KEY THEMES

Throughout the series, three key themes were raised by multiple speakers.

1. Focus on relationship-building

Every speaker in the series stressed the importance of building and strengthening relationships when seeking to buy with impact. Whether an organization is trying to support Indigenous or diverse-owned businesses, or better understand what supports the people in their community are asking for, community and stakeholder engagement and vendor outreach are essential to the success of any social procurement framework.

BCSPI has created a [Vendor Outreach Guide](#) to support organizations to build relationships with new vendors, and deepen engagement with existing suppliers.

2. What gets measured gets done

As many speakers reiterated, "measurement matters." In Session 1, Judy Kitts (Greater Victoria Harbour Authority) shared that without setting targets, they would not have been able to benchmark where they already were, or what areas they wanted to improve in. After a short testing period, they were able to raise their targets and increase their impact.

Mayor Karen Elliott (District of Squamish) reinforces the importance of measurement as a way to understand an organization's cumulative impact. She encourages all BCSPI members to start small, and make it visual.

3. Conscious choices have big impacts

Speakers encouraged attendees that a small action can have many positive ripple effects. Mayor Elliott encourages everyone to revisit their purchasing policies, and update them to reflect their organizational values.

Even without an overhaul of policy, being more conscious and more critical of existing practices, and finding spaces to try new things or shift purchasing priorities, will bring benefits to any community.

SESSION 1

How can social procurement engage Indigenous businesses?

Speakers Judy Kitts ([Greater Victoria Harbour Authority](#)) and Ron Arcos ([NEDC](#)) shared their expertise in this first event, which explored how local governments and institutions can use their purchasing power to support economic reconciliation and procure from Indigenous businesses. [Watch the recording](#) for the full conversation.



Judy Kitts

First Nations Engagement
Manager | Greater Victoria
Harbour Authority



Ron Arcos

Business Development
Officer | NEDC (Nuu-
chah-nulth Economic
Development
Corporation)

Discussion takeaways

1. It's all about building relationships

As Judy Kitts explains, it's not enough to send an email or make a social media post. Organizations need to get out and meet suppliers in person. The success of Indigenous procurement at the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA) has come from being focused on relationships.

She also adds that Victoria is a small place, which has been an advantage. Relationships have snowballed as more businesses reach out to connect with the GVHA once they hear about their procurement policy within their community or Nation.

2. Access existing directories and networks

Knowing who is available to buy from can increase an organization's success when sharing contracting chances with Indigenous businesses. Judy Kitts recommends networking, as there are a number of Indigenous business directories as well as Aboriginal economic development corporations across Canada that actively work with Indigenous businesses.

Both Ron and Judy had a note of caution around the challenge of keeping directories updated, and that they can miss the smaller local businesses. Directories and networks are a place to start but direct engagement is also part of the strategy.



“It is not enough to be just a principle anymore. People want to see what action the organization is taking ... I am reminded of Carol-Ann Hilton, and the \$100B Indigenous economy. If everyone does their little bit, it is cumulative and you will see the effects of that wealth in the community.” - Judy Kitts

SESSION 1

How can social procurement engage Indigenous businesses?

Discussion takeaways, cont.

3. Give advance notice

Ron Arcos from NEDC shared that a common barrier for businesses to work with local governments is a lack of time or warning to prepare a proposal or build capacity.

“RFPs should be posted within a reasonable time period. The worst thing is for us to be approached on a Thursday and everything has to be in by Monday. That timeframe doesn’t make sense.” - Ron Arcos

Sharing a list of upcoming projects or routine purchases may enable many more businesses to take advantage of the procurement opportunities an organization provides.

4. Be flexible

The process of social procurement takes time, and organizations have to be realistic with their objectives. Ron Arcos shares that “I am a fan of baby steps. It takes time and you have to be realistic about what the objective is. Start small and make it grow. First make the connection.”

Purchasers can also unbundle projects to create more opportunity for engagement or ask their large project contractors about their hiring and contracting to incorporate Indigenous businesses in the project supply chain.

5. What gets measured gets done

“I believe what the CCAB says, what gets measured gets done. So we started with 2% operational goal, 3% capital goal, raised now to 3% operational and 5% capital. Having these targets and meeting quarterly to see where you are at is helpful. It can be discouraging if you are not there, but it can also be encouraging to say ‘hey we need to reach out to these businesses to find opportunities.’” - Judy Kitts

6. Harness purchasing power for reconciliation and community wealth building

Judy Kitts shares that their Indigenous procurement policy has helped internally with employee morale and the GVHA’s commitment to First Nation relationships and partnerships. Often, employees want to see these kinds of initiatives in practice where they work.

Two concrete actions to take now

1: Try and meet with a local Indigenous business. Make a goal to meet one or two a month and connect. – Judy Kitts

2: Reach out to your local Aboriginal capital corporation. They are right across Canada. From there referrals can be made. – Ron Arcos

SESSION 2

How can social procurement support my local economy?

This event focussed on how public purchasers can create healthy local economies. Speakers Alisha Masongsong ([City of Vancouver](#)) and Amy Robinson ([LOCO BC](#)) shared best practice advice, and reflected on community outcomes ranging from reconciliation to community economic development. [Watch the recording](#) for the full conversation.

“Purchasers need to commit to doing outreach differently.” - Amy Robinson



Alisha Masongsong

Community Economic
Development Planner | City
of Vancouver



Amy Robinson

Founder | LOCO BC

Discussion takeaways

1. Local economies create more impact

Social procurement presents an opportunity to decolonize purchasing practices and our approach to business. When purchasers spend their money locally, money recirculates in that community at a higher rate than when purchasing from multinational corporations (LOCO BC Report on [The Economic Impact of Local Business](#)).

Amy Robinson points out that “local businesses are 24 times more likely to give to local charities and causes,” and that these causes are more directly targeted to local concerns.

2. Access existing directories and networks

Knowing who is available to buy from will increase an organization's success in sharing contracting chances with local businesses. Amy Robinson suggests that the best practice is to rely on Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Associations and local business directories.

Alisha Masongsong adds that local community economic development networks are another valuable resource, and recommends that organizations collaborate and learn from them, or support them with funding to bolster social procurement discussions and initiatives.

SESSION 2

How can social procurement support my local economy?

Discussion takeaways, cont.

3. Work collaboratively towards shared goals

Working collaboratively is essential to the success of a social procurement policy or framework. One requirement for this is that everyone in an organization should be aware of how social procurement helps its various teams meet their goals, as well as the larger organizational goals.

For municipalities, Alisha Masongsong emphasizes that “staff need to be educated and work together across departments to meet procurement and community goals.”

4. Pilot and test, pilot and test

It can be good to start with a small pilot. Alisha Masongsong stresses the importance of pilots and tests, suggesting that organizations should take learnings from one project forward.

In the case of the City of Vancouver, they model this through their [Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Framework](#), which is still being tested and iterated. Once the City has learned from their tests, developed best practices, and incorporated feedback from City purchasers and local suppliers, then they will formalize a policy.

5. Learn from your community

Both Amy Robinson and Alisha Masongsong emphasize the importance of learning from community and creating space for feedback and knowledge sharing. Alisha recommends that purchasers “always go back to community, to suppliers, and learn from them.” Some things an organization can seek to understand are:

- What opportunities are there?
- Where is there need for support or education for suppliers and purchasers?

It is important to share learnings and knowledge amongst social procurement practitioners as we work together to shape the social value marketplace.

Two concrete actions to take now

1: “Find your social procurement champions and work with them to start piloting.” - Alisha Masongsong

2: “Reach out to the local business community, you’ll be surprised by the amazing suppliers who exist.” - Amy Robinson

SESSION 3

How can social procurement increase food security?

In this timely conversation, speakers Heather O'Hara ([BC Farmer's Markets](#)) and Jennifer Reynolds ([Nourish Leadership](#)), shared advice on changing supply chains and purchasing policies to increase food security in local communities. [Watch the recording](#) for the full conversation.



Heather O'Hara

Executive Director | BC
Farmer's Markets



Jennifer Reynolds

Co-Executive Director |
Nourish Leadership

Discussion takeaways

1. This is a timely conversation

When the pandemic began, it highlighted the vulnerability of global supply chains for many people in Canada, and showed how they could be jeopardized. BC saw further evidence of this with flooding and highway closures in the winter of 2021.

It's a good reminder that purchasers need to look at how to respond and support in their local communities, and creating food resiliency across BC.

2. Food security creates healthy communities

People who are food insecure are often working one or two jobs, but their other costs of living are still too high for food dollars to go far enough. Food security is about ensuring access to quality, healthy, nourishing food that is grown with respect for planet and people, and that is culturally appropriate.

Heather O'Hara and Jennifer Reynolds shared the ways that food security is connected to social benefit: it brings people together through farmers markets and other relationships; by reducing the supply chain radius it can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimize climate impacts; and it can have a high social return on investment for the local economy.



“The people facing food insecurity are not who you think, and we need to understand and solve for these issues.” - Jennifer Reynolds

SESSION 3

How can social procurement increase food security?

Discussion takeaways, cont.

3. Conscious choices have big impacts

Conscious choices in purchasing have an impact. When Heather O'Hara worked at [Potluck Catering](#), a social enterprise in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, she saw how small catering orders could add up quickly, and create income and wages for people who may not otherwise have been employed. Likewise, purchasing from local farmers and food producers keeps their businesses going, supports the maintenance of local food lands, and keeps money in local economies. As Heather says: "Purchasing power is powerful!"

4. Think about the true cost

True cost accounting asks, "where does the money go?" It's seeking to understand how money is recirculated, or multiplied for social value when purchases are kept local or socially-minded. Think beyond just the cost of the goods, and consider what a purchase from a local supplier would mean for the local food system.

Jennifer Reynolds also encourages thinking about best value in measurement, and that purchasers re-evaluate what they assess or score. When looking at nutrition, for example, "local and sustainable food outperforms food from the global food system." The downstream effects of buying from local suppliers also include environmental benefits and preserving food lands.

5. Get creative to support local food producers

"It's not an *or* situation, it's an *and*. What could you add?" – Heather O'Hara

There were several ideas shared about how procurement can support food security and food producers:

- Work with local farmers to "forward grow" by ordering in advance, which provides them with a guaranteed sale, like an "institutional CSA."
- Unbundle purchases and move away from group purchases to provide more opportunities for social purpose and local suppliers to bid on and win contracts.
- Get creative with land. Kristi Fairholm Mader, event moderator, shared a great example in Sandown Centre, from the community of Saanich on Vancouver Island, where they have turned a former race track into a learning and innovation food hub.

Two concrete actions to take now

1: See who the suppliers are in your community, forge relationships with them, and find ways to bring their products into your institution. Feature producers in your area to staff or community, for example through lunch and learns, or CSA drop-offs. - Jennifer Reynolds

2: Change your menus to consider seasonality and how to incorporate local produce. Talk to farmers, make a call and find out what's possible. - Heather O'Hara

SESSION 4

How can social procurement support diversity and inclusion?

This event focussed on how organizations can support equity and work toward diversity and inclusion goals. Speakers Nerissa Allen ([BBABC](#)) and Dugan Selkirk ([Community Futures BC](#)) shared best practices to work towards closing the purchasing gap for people of colour and the disability community. [Watch the recording](#) for the full conversation.

“Look at ways you can spread your purchasing power across a more diversified pool of vendors.” - Nerissa Allen



Nerissa Allen

Co-Founder & President |
Black Business Association
of BC (BBABC)



Dugan Selkirk

Business Advisor for the
Entrepreneurs with
Disabilities Program |
Community Futures BC

Discussion Takeaways

1. This gap in purchasing needs to be addressed

As moderator Kristi Fairholm Mader shared, “public sector acquisition of goods and services is 13% of Canada’s GDP... It makes this a fundamental lever in order to achieve social and environmental objectives.”

The gap in purchasing from many groups in society – including the Black community and the disability community – is being spotlighted at this time, and public purchasers have an opportunity to use procurement to create long-term shifts for the better.

2. Take advantage of existing diverse business networks, build relationships

Nerissa Allen shared that for their members at BBABC, one of the main challenges business owners face is that purchasers don’t know where to find them. While BBABC is taking it upon themselves to support this search with the launch of their new [Online Directory and Marketplace](#), Nerissa Allen and Dugan Selkirk also emphasized the importance of purchasers building their networks with organizations who can facilitate connections into targeted vendor communities.

For any of the social value objectives an organization is trying to meet with its social procurement policy and implementation, there are also suppliers who are contributing to those goals. Sometimes an organization just needs to build relationships with the intermediaries who can facilitate connections.

SESSION 4

How can social procurement support diversity and inclusion?

Discussion takeaways, cont.

3. Diverse-owned businesses can bring many kinds of impact to the table

Beyond meeting or fulfilling organizational goals to support equity-deserving communities and business owners, diverse-owned businesses can create many positive social impacts at once. Many businesses and business owners have intersectional identities, and possess a wide range of social purpose missions.

As an example, Nerissa Allen shares that BBABC is working to become carbon neutral, and that they support their members with workshops and training to achieve a wide range of environmental and social targets in their business practices.

4. Leverage small spends for big impact

Both Nerissa Allen and Dugan Selkirk emphasize that capacity for larger-scale contracts is one of the largest barriers to taking advantage of procurement opportunities for the entrepreneurs they work with. While supporting social value suppliers to build their capacity is important, there are also ways to use smaller, discretionary purchases to support diverse businesses immediately.

“Focus on your small spends. What are the direct awards that can take place? How can you carve smaller sub-contracts out of a larger project?” asked Kristi Fairholm Mader, series moderator. Sub-contracts are a way to provide an accessible opportunity that can also build capacity and trust.

5. Reflect on your current vendor list

Nerissa Allen encourages purchasers to take stock of what their current supply networks look like. Once current suppliers and purchases are identified, organizations can research options to diversify, and explore additional vendor options.

6. Consider the economic multiplier effect

Purchasing from businesses owned or controlled by members of equity-deserving groups has many positive returns within a community. Nerissa Allen sees these purchases making a difference by “empowering change in communities that have been impacted by systemic barriers. As these communities grow, they increase their economic impact on their local community, on their local economy, and on the Canadian economy as a whole.”

Two concrete actions to take now

1: Business owners: reach out for help, and look online for supports for the type of business you do or for the community you belong to. - Dugan Selkirk

2: If you don't know where to start or you need help in that journey we (BBABC) can support networking amongst our business community and facilitate conversations between yourself and vendors. - Nerissa Allen

SESSION 5

How can social procurement address climate change?

With a shared passion for addressing climate change through good purchasing and good business practice, Mayor Karen Elliott ([District of Squamish](#)) and impact-driven entrepreneur Yamila Franco shared insights on procurement to support climate change response and environmental wellbeing. [Watch the recording](#) for the full conversation.

Discussion takeaways

1. Policy is a powerful tool for change

When the District of Squamish began to implement social procurement, they started with their [Purchasing Policy](#).

“We felt it was the opportunity to start socializing the idea and educating our elected officials, our staff, and our community.” – Mayor Karen Elliott

Mayor Elliott suggests that when updating a purchasing policy, organizations should leverage the definitions section and make clear commitments to social and environmental outcomes. Changes in policy also allow governments to push and change markets, and to revisit their internal processes.

“We can see that governments are beginning to ask for different things. They’re creating market signalling. Alongside saying these outcomes will be required, governments can also take a look at their own processes to allow for those organizations and companies to be able to respond in that fair, transparent, competitive manner.” – Kristi Fairholm Mader, series moderator



Karen Elliott

Mayor | District of Squamish



Yamila Franco

Impact-Driven
Entrepreneur



“A lot of people are already doing amazing work in their businesses but they don’t know how to identify it or how to amplify it. Finding a standard to align with can help.” - Yamila Franco

SESSION 5

How can social procurement address climate change?

Discussion takeaways, con't

2 Measurement matters

Measurement is important not only to track the environmental or social impacts of an organization's purchasing, but also to track progress. Mayor Elliott suggests starting small, and making it visual.

Yamila Franco suggests using an existing standard or framework to inform strategies for measurement, such as the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). She also urges everyone to remember that impact can be about the byproducts of what a producer sells or makes, or what an organization buys.

3 Think about the lifecycle of goods you procure

"If you look at plastic waste as a whole, and the fact that there's so much waste and now you have waste leaking into the oceans, and then you have animals and fish being affected... how does that impact aquaculture for example? That is that circularity, we're looking at what does it impact along the way... if you look at how our decisions impact other economies and local economies, we pay for it one way or another." - Yamila Franco

4 Leverage certifications to avoid greenwashing

Certifications are useful for both suppliers and governments. For suppliers, find a standard to align business practices with, such as the B Corp model or UN SDGs. If certification isn't an option, Yamila Franco says "it also matters how you tell your story and report on impact."

For governments, searching for certifications or adding them to the RFX evaluation and weighting processes can support businesses, and help purchasers to avoid supporting companies who are greenwashing but don't deliver on social value outcomes. Certifying bodies also can support governments to connect with businesses, matching suppliers and purchasers to support ease of procurement.

5 Climate change is a social issue

Climate change is an issue with social causes and social impacts, which are not equally felt across communities. And social procurement can and often does include environmental considerations as well – the Squamish Purchasing Policy is one great example of this.

Two concrete actions to take now

1: "Start shifting your thinking away from the bottom line. Then, go read your procurement policy and think about its power to do more." - Mayor Karen Elliott

2: "Action starts with culture. Try to shift your internal culture, talk with coworkers, share your knowledge, and work together to brainstorm next steps." - Yamila Franco

RESOURCES

Continue learning and find tools to take action

Engage Indigenous Business:

1. BC Government report: [What We Heard](#)
2. List of [Aboriginal Financial Institutions](#)
3. Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA) [Indigenous relations report](#)
4. GVHA [Indigenous Business Directory](#)
5. [CCAB Directory](#) (nation-wide)
6. [Indigenous Procurement Best Practices](#) from Indigenous Corporate Training Inc
7. Book recommendation: [Indigenomics](#) by Carol Anne Hilton

Support Local Economies:

1. LOCO BC [Impact Assessment](#)
2. City of Vancouver [Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Framework](#)
3. City of Vancouver [Community Benefit Agreement Policy](#)
4. BC Buy Local [business directory and stories of impact](#)
5. Buy Social Canada [Supplier Guide to Social Procurement](#)

Increase Food Security:

1. [Case study](#) on the power of public sector procurement
2. BC Farmers Markets [economic and social benefits study](#)
3. Delivering community benefit: [Healthy food playbook](#)
4. [Quebec Sustainable Procurement](#) legislation example
5. North Saanich [Sandown project](#)

Support Diversity and Inclusion:

1. BBABC [Online Directory and Marketplace](#)
2. Best practice example: [City of Victoria Purchasing Policy](#)
3. Best practice example: [District of Squamish Procurement Policy](#)
4. Public Services and Procurement Canada: [Accessible Procurement strategy](#)
5. Article: [Disability Inclusion Improves Supply Chain Performance](#)
6. [Inclusive Procurement Guide](#) (CGLCC)
7. Office of the Procurement Ombudsman: [supplier diversity in social procurement](#)

Address Climate Change:

1. Oslo's [procurement considerations for climate and energy](#) (page 10)
2. [District of Squamish podcast](#): Mayor Elliott and Sunniva from Oslo
3. [Circular economy](#)
4. [B Corp](#)
5. [UN SDGs](#)
6. Book recommendation: [Citizens Guide to Climate Success](#)

CONCLUSION

"Purchasing power is powerful!" - Heather O'Hara, BC Farmer's Markets

Our purchases have impacts far beyond the initial economic transaction. Organizations across BC have an incredible opportunity to leverage those purchases to benefit people, planet and community.

As the "Purchasing Power" series demonstrates, there are passionate advocates and networks throughout BC and the country who are here to support local governments and institutions to leverage their spending to address growing community concerns.

STAY INVOLVED

- Sign up for the [BCSPI newsletter](#) to stay up to date on the latest updates from the collaborative
- For existing BCSPI Members, visit the [Member Home](#) for resources, tools and templates, training registration, and much more
- For prospective members, [connect with us](#) to explore membership options, or [learn more](#) about membership
- [Let us know](#) what issues we should explore in a future Purchasing Power event



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