

The Social Role of Community Festivals in Place Making

The Findings, Impacts and Reflections of
Halifax Asian Food Festival 2021.



Joyce Liu (centre) and her team are behind the first-ever Halifax Asian Food Festival under Off The Eaten Path (Chris Stoodley/CityNews Halifax)

Report prepared by The Wave Projects / Feb 2022

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Introduction

Nova Scotia's population growth is evidently due to the increase of Immigrant and newcomer populations who heavily contributed to its multicultural fabric today. With that comes an incremental sense of newness of new cultures and tastes. And with an emerging cultural diversity amongst many Canadian cities, it's become instrumental to develop inclusive practices amongst our community. Off the Eaten Path foresees multicultural food festivals as a community engagement tool serving vital economic and social benefits.

Halifax's first Asian Food Festival (AFF) sheds light on Asian Culture and food businesses. It celebrates persons of Asian descent partaking in the food industry across Nova Scotia. Beyond the economic benefits AFF brings, such as providing a low-barrier entrance for small businesses to generate profit, increase sales, gain exposure etc. the social benefits allow for long-term essential values. In the meantime, obstacles faced during the curation of AFF revealed loopholes in our systems. Underdeveloped relationships with community based groups such as the Asian community limits the prosperity of diverse businesses and the integration (inclusivity) of ethnic persons in the community. Facing such obstacles and realizing the community's needs will strengthen partnerships and the community at large.

This report measures context-specific needs and evaluates the impact of AFF in terms of the event's aims and objectives. It indicates what values did AFF really offer to business vendors and visitors and how it is meaningful to the community. We utilize our skills as Community Designers to analyze insightful information on what social role AFF plays in placemaking. To assess the community level benefits bought by AFF, it is essential to explore and measure the individual level benefits as well. In this case, the individual level would be to measure the success of the food businesses as indicators to the community's benefits.



IMPACT



26 Asian Restaurants
from **6** Asian Countries
participated in the 1st AFF

**AFFOR
DABLE**

All speciality dishes in AFF's
menu was at an affordable
rate of **\$10-\$20**



Over **951** AFF menu items
sold in 3 days



Gross sales of over **\$12,000**
in total with 27 participating
restaurants



Top Sales of AFF combo is
213, sold in 3 days



over 75% restaurants see
increase in sales and
customer volume



100% satisfaction rate of
our team service



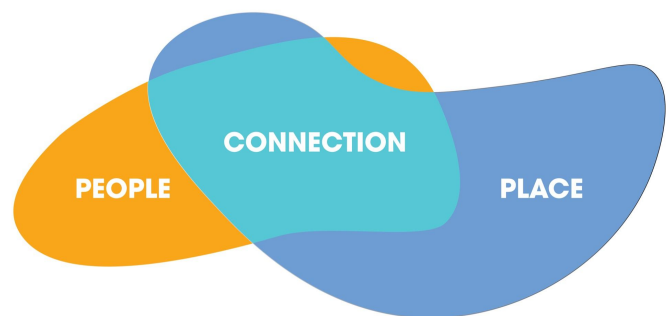
Reached over **10K** visitors
across our website and
social media platforms, as
well widely published and
shared by local media and
news outlets.



100% said they will
participate next year!

Process

The methodology used to bring Asian Food Festival to life referenced *Project for Public Spaces'* placemaking process that focuses on community-based projects that are "*Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper*". These short-term experiential projects are described by PPS as "*A low cost, high impact incremental framework...and capitalizes on the creative energy of the community to efficiently generate new uses and revenue for places.*" (p.19, PPS Inc.) Following this, we were able to construct our own framework. First, we looked at the place and the people within this space. Then, we evaluated both and identified key issues. The solution was in creating a connection within this space. This is how we created people-place connections through AFF.



STEP 1 - Define People + Place

Nova Scotia saw a surge of refugees, immigrants and newcomers in the past two years that called for a celebratory article announcement released by the province of Nova Scotia commemorating a one million population milestone. This means there's work to be done to meet our goals of building a sustainable economy and an inclusive Nova Scotia. With the growth of our multicultural communities, we must ensure retention and help build equitable, inclusive and diverse opportunities for all to prosper.

To kick start, Off the Eaten Path focused on the Asian community, bringing to Halifax its first ever Asian Food Festival in partnership with key stakeholders: sister company Lumi Studios, Downtown Business Association, Spring Garden Area Business Association, TD Bank, and Develop NS.

STEP 2 - Evaluate People + Place

Many immigrant and newcomer businesses opened throughout the pandemic years and most have gone unnoticed. People were not exploring new places when many opened their doors at varying locations in downtown Halifax such as, at the lower floors of Spring Garden Place, and others.

We asked ourselves: Why don't we see diverse Asian businesses participating in local business community events? What obstacles are discouraging their participation? We explored this during the curation of AFF and identified the following issues:

1. Representation matters and Asian business owners do not feel represented amongst the business community in Nova Scotia.
2. Most, but not all Asian communities, are an introverted culture by nature. There is no effort or action taken in trying to integrate these communities or persons in the conversation.
3. Most Asian owned businesses (and other diverse businesses) are generally family owned and generational, meaning, they are run by varying generations of their family members, but are mostly led by elders. The businesses growth are then limited to:
 - a. Staff: minimal number of employees
 - b. Communication: language barrier is a significant issue and non-existent representation causes lack of trust between diverse businesses and the business community. This leads to loss of opportunities like networking, participating in programs and resources that may help them enhance their business.
 - c. Technological capabilities: Elders from diverse communities are not interested in having an online presence. They might not comprehend the opportunities in acquiring social media platforms. And so, they're not focused on enhancing their growth.

We asked,

- 1. What are the loopholes in our system that are delaying the growth of diverse businesses in accessing equitable opportunities amongst the business community?*
- 2. What needs to be done in order to reach a goal of an equitable, fair, and inclusive local economy in Nova Scotia?*
- 3. What are effective ways to encourage diverse businesses to integrate themselves into the community?*

We realized it was vital to these diverse businesses' success that they efficiently connect with the local business community and with customers. As a diverse team, we reached out to the businesses and their associations to help them realize opportunities, ease communication and work with them on their engagement within the community. To connect various stakeholders and to achieve a greater impact, we realized the need to create fun and social events. It's important that we address this as the integration of diverse businesses in enhancing our Arts & Culture sector in Nova Scotia will significantly contribute to the economic growth and development of Nova Scotia's economy.

STEP 3 - Our Vision - the Connection

Our objectives strategically align with Nova Scotia's Culture Plan in helping drive awareness and economic growth of the culture sector and seek excellence in cultural stewardship. AFF aims to invest, promote and collaborate to benefit communities looking to expand their businesses and practice their creativity in the culture sector. Our goal is to continuously create a sense of belonging amongst Nova Scotians, celebrate our cultural identities, build pride of place and bring people together. We aspire to create more meaningful connections and tell stories of people to showcase Nova Scotia as a multicultural hub for entrepreneurs. Understanding each other's stories and needs is essential to creating an inclusive and safe Nova Scotia. AFF's long-term objectives are to

- Activate urban spaces by curating fun and engaging events while promoting food festivals as a tool for community engagement in the place-making process.
- Attract economic activities to main streets.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the diverse community made up by the growing number of immigrants.
- Promote more inclusive community events that engage all communities.
- Develop new relationships with community-based groups in NS.
- Support new-comer families transitioning to NS.
- Increase retention of youth, immigrants, refugees and newcomers.
- Promote provincial and regional tourism of Nova Scotia's identity.

STEP 4 - Create the Connection - Piloting Project

In order to curate AFF, we must understand our target audience's needs. We understood that in order to include Asian businesses in the festival or in any business opportunity, they valued representation. The execution of AFF's first edition was astonishing in terms of time and

efficiency due to our understanding of this need. Our strength lies within our team's diversity and so, it was essential to recruit a diverse workforce to help reach the businesses and include them in the process.

Our diverse employees approached Asian businesses and helped them with basic tasks:

- Completing application forms
- Applying to receive permits
- Preparing for event participation
- Help them understand their branding
- Help them register for social media platforms to promote their business and amplify their audience reach and customer base.

Within six weeks, we successfully recruited 26 Asian Food Businesses to participate in the 3-day festival with a specialty dish. To execute this connection within a space and in a community engagement event, we collaborated with Develop NS to bring Asian Food Carnival to Halifax's waterfront for a day.



STEP 5 - Ongoing Re-evaluation & Long-term Improvements

Our team evaluated the impact of Asian Food Festival and Asian Food Carnival by collecting, analyzing and assessing necessary data on the participating restaurants, on our partners and community. We collected direct data and feedback from the participating Asian businesses including their sales increase, number of dishes sold within a given duration, satisfaction rate and metrics pertaining to social media engagement. We created two surveys, one for Asian Food Festival, and one for Asian Food Carnival Day. We asked questions like: Do your numbers show an increase in your customer base? Did you see an increase in comparison to your usual sales in light of the festival? How satisfied were you working with us as event organizers and being participants of Asian Food Festival? Do they see a long-time benefit to being participants or partners of this event?

During Asian Food Carnival Day, we used quantitative methods to analyze traffic flow. Using a digital application, our team was able to count traffic flow during peak hours of the carnival and during low traffic hours. These numbers helped us assess the success of the festival in attracting the community to Halifax waterfront. Collecting this data helps us assess community engagement efforts and helps to re-evaluate the goals and objectives of AFF.

We re-evaluated the data and crossed it with the goals and objectives set for AFF. We asked:

- Do the numbers collected from the restaurant participants and vendors from Carnival Day indicates that we are attracting economic activities to main streets?
- Does our traffic flow count support that we are activating urban spaces and are encouraging community engagement between diverse business owners and customers?
- Do the sales numbers of the food festival combos indicate that we are helping small businesses with their economic growth?
- Is feedback from our community showing an increase in public awareness and understanding of our diverse community? Especially how diverse Asian culture is?
- Is the feedback from restaurant owners and key stakeholders showing the development of new relationships with diverse community-based groups and persons?
- Are we meeting the goal set in promoting provincial and regional tourism of Nova Scotia by reaching a wide audience reach on our digital platforms?

Findings

The 6 main IMPACTS of AFF on the community are:

1. AFF has a direct impact on the financial health of diverse persons and small businesses.
2. Place-making: activating urban spaces by bringing economic value to Nova Scotia's main streets and Halifax waterfront.
3. Engaging the community to promote inclusivity as diverse persons felt represented.

4. Developed business and friendly relationships with community based groups in NS, that is the Asian community by recruiting the right workforce that represented those businesses and their needs.
5. Created social places, a sense of place, and thus, a sense of belonging.
6. Promoted understanding of how diverse Asian culture is.

OBSTACLES Identified

We faced the following obstacles when working with these diverse businesses. We found out that most of these businesses:

- Acquire approximately 20% knowledge of the local business context which indicates *a lot* about their integration in the business community.
- Most of these businesses don't have a social media presence which was challenging to link for promotion, tags, location tags off of instagram, digital menus etc.
- Do not speak english
- Do not use email
- Were suffering from a post-pandemic era where life itself shifted online and so, they were dependent on their usual clientele.
- Prefer conducting business in-person and do not rely on any other means of communication which could be very inefficient and limiting to their growth.

We realized an event like AFF to come to life requires heavy effort. To make the event successful, it had to be inclusive. To integrate businesses facing the above obstacles, the solution was to knock on their door, one by one and have a person from our team speak their language to best communicate with.

OPPORTUNITIES Identified

Below are the opportunities AFF provided to Asian businesses:

- They benefited from exposure as a result of strong marketing.
- They got to experience firsthand the impact of digital marketing on their business.
- They realized the need for services like social media platforms to help them.
- They realized the need to participate and communicate with the local business community to benefit from programs that will help grow their business.
- AFF offered businesses a wider audience reach and an increase from their usual clientele which allowed businesses to service outside their immediate community and increase community engagement with outsider Locals.
- The community at large benefited from knowing and supporting a new business meanwhile, experiencing a new taste and culture.
- AFF opened doors for businesses to participate by collaborating with sponsors. With more sponsors, we were able to lower registration fees and include more businesses.
- Our team strategically marketed Asian businesses as attraction spots in Halifax and featured them in a guide for “10+ things to do in the city.”

We identified the above obstacles and provided a solution for each issue to create an opportunity for Asian businesses to feel integrated into the community. We helped them learn about essential technical skills and communication means that are vital to their success and growth in a post-pandemic era. The idea is to help them recognize these opportunities and triangulate them under a big community.

Moving Forward

Values in Strong Partnerships

We are thankful for the first edition of AFF's sponsors & collaborators for taking the time and energy to invest in AFF's vision and event. Your sponsorship and support is integral to our ability to serve local businesses and our communities to improve the quality of life for all.

We'd like to highlight our sponsors for AFF's first year:

TD Bank of Canada (AFF's Title Sponsor), Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA), Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC), K.W Commercial, Labour Skills and Immigration, All Lane Immigration, Fantuan, Golden Touch, Rogers Media, Develop NS for the venue and all participating restaurants for their efforts.

This report identifies and evaluates the impact of the mentioned sponsors and collaborators' investment in AFF and highlights the achievements this festival brought to our city. Through this event, we were able to help diverse businesses of Asian descent recognize their place in Nova Scotia's business community by helping integrate, include and celebrate their business. We helped build strong business bonds between Asian businesses and the city's business associations which inevitably builds a stronger community.

Having the resources and funding from our sponsors and collaborators helped us achieve a strong marketing campaign in a limited time. This offered great exposure for the businesses and for AFF. The funds allowed for more businesses to participate as we were able to lower the registration fees which helped the businesses feel supported.

AFF helped its sponsors and collaborators achieve their goals and showcase the value of their investment in Halifax's first Asian Food Festival. Through AFF, we were able to

- Encourage people to participate in events and activities that bring diverse people together.
- Bring Arts & Culture initiatives that reflect new, under-represented and diverse voices,
- Include diverse people facing barriers to working in the business sector to develop direct and relevant support and experience
- Creating connections for people who may face social isolation within their communities.

Linked Opportunities

Throughout AFF, we met many local diverse foodies who brought forth linked opportunities and ideas to AFF's curator, Off the Eaten Path, a platform bringing place-making, policy-making, research and education, and cultural diversity through Food. The curation of AFF inspired a sister-project called World Cafe. A pop-up cafe concept hosting diverse chefs or persons in the culinary field looking to create worldly tastes and try their services in a shared-kitchen space. Through World Cafe, we'd create a community of diverse chefs, offering them space and opportunities to showcase skills and talents. Encouraging their integration and interaction within the business community by offering resources for networking will allow for an entrepreneurial route, a common path for immigrants, refugees, and at-home culinary chefs from underrepresented communities.

In The Following Years...

AFF will be a yearly festival taking place in May, commemorating Asian Heritage Month in Nova Scotia. The Second Edition of Halifax's Asian Food Festival is set to take place May 16th - 22nd of 2022. We're anticipating a Carnival Day where communities can come out and celebrate Asian Food, Arts & Culture. We're looking to expand AFF not only across Nova Scotia, but also to New Brunswick and PEI to address desert diverse food areas especially in rural areas of the region.

Future Sponsorships & Collaborations



We offer various levels of Sponsorship Packages and streams of partnerships



We appreciate any type of in-kind donations.
(event space/venues, marketing, event supplies etc.)



Brand Recognition Opportunities
(online ad spots, social media mentions, product placement, influencer marketing etc.)



The [Wave Projects](#) is a non-profit organization founded in 2019 focused on curating and supporting projects that result in people-place connections. These projects utilize community design and digital marketing tools to promote community development and engagement throughout Halifax and Nova Scotia.

It's most recent initiative, Off the Eaten Path (OTEP), aids diverse restaurants and food businesses looking to participate in curated international food festivals like AFF, that celebrate and reflect their culture and services. OTEP has a direct impact on the **financial health** of persons and small businesses. The community at large in Nova Scotia will benefit from social events created to convey a message of inclusivity, a need with our growing immigrant population. Celebrating our diversity and conversing in a safe and welcoming environment is essential to the well being and quality of life of Nova Scotians.



REFERENCES

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APPENDIX #1

Participating Restaurants: 2021 Halifax Asian Food Festival - 1st Edition

Food Business	Culture Origin
May Garden Chinese Restaurant	Chinese
BACKOOS (BK KOREAN FOOD LTD.)	Korean
Kyo Kitchen & Bar	Japanese
Baiwei Grill Bar	Chinese
Hi Tea	Chinese
Sushi Nami Royale	Japanese
Busan Korean BBQ	Korean
Happy Garden	Chinese
The Red Asian Fusion Restaurant	Chinese
Let's Ko Restaurant Inc	Korean
Rasa: Flavours of India	Indian
Cacao70 Eatery	Chinese
Taipan Express	Chinese
Sugar Bakery	Chinese
Pinehouse Traditional Chinese Restaurant	Chinese
Star Anis Vietnamese Noodles	Vietnamese
Ready For Joy	Chinese
Chicking	Korean
Rabbit Hole Cafe	Chinese
Yonghe Noodle House	Chinese
La Rozzi Bistro	Filipino
Tsujiri Halifax	Japanese
Zenq Halifax	Chinese
Noodle Waroom	Chinese
Sweet Secret Bakery	Chinese
Chatime - Lacewood	Twainese / Filipino owned business

Participating Restaurant's Level of Satisfaction

