



Restaurant Workplace Culture  
Shift: Proactive Strategies for  
Owners and Operators

# FINAL REPORT

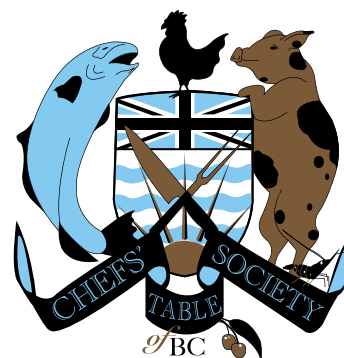
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Restaurant Workplace Culture Shift Program was created to strengthen BC's foodservice sector by helping small- and medium-sized restaurant operators professionalize their people practices, improve workplace culture, and increase staff recruitment and retention. The program addresses a longstanding challenge in the industry: operators recognize the importance of people-first policies, but few have the time, tools, or expertise to develop and implement them on their own.

Recognizing this moment of transformation, the Chefs' Table Society of BC (CTS) received funding from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills to provide one-on-one support to at least 95 small and medium-sized (SME) independent restaurant operators across British Columbia. The goal was simple but ambitious: to strengthen the foundation of restaurant workplaces by helping owners and operators adopt practical, people-first strategies for recruitment, retention, and long-term culture change.

**The program combined high-touch engagement with practical tools and resources, delivered through three key components:**

1. **A Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift** – outlining best practices for respect, accountability, communication, and care.
2. **A Workplace Culture Toolkit** – a curated library of customizable policies, templates, and checklists to support team management and legal compliance.
3. **An Online Resource Hub** – where operators can complete an online self-assessment, download tools, and access plain-language guidance on people-first practices.



Participating restaurants began with an online self-assessment to benchmark their people programs, followed by one-on-one sessions with trained project leads who identified specific needs and opportunities. After each meeting, the business received a set of tools and templates tailored to their needs—such as a respectful workplace policy, orientation checklists, a code of conduct, and performance development grids—that were practical and customizable. To assist them on their journey to build a stronger people-first workplace culture, they were also provided direct introductions to additional industry supports like go2HR, Mind the Bar, and People Working Well so that specific human resources and mental health concerns can be addressed now and in the future. This approach ensured operators were met where they are, with legally sound, plain-language tools, based on actual operator experiences, that were immediately usable and relevant to their realities.



## Program Reach and Outcomes:

- 140 restaurant units engaged through one-on-one outreach, representing 58 single-unit operators and 82 multi-unit concepts.
- 14 additional operators completed the online assessment.
- Businesses participated from across BC, including the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island & Coast, Thompson Okanagan, North Coast, Cariboo, and Kootenay.
- Over 30 customizable tools and templates were developed, distributed, and refined through direct operator feedback.
- Dozens of real-world management challenges were addressed in real time, resulting in updated resources and shared best practices.

The program was guided by a governance committee of industry leaders who ensured the content was relevant, realistic, and directly responsive to operators' needs. It was supported by a web of industry associations and partners that shared the program updates and resources with their members across the province. This collaborative model ensured that the program remained grounded in the lived experience of restaurateurs while building credibility and momentum across the sector.

The results are clear: operators reported increased confidence in applying people-first practices that support healthier workplace culture, foster belonging, strengthen recruitment, retention, and improve overall business performance. By investing in workplace culture, this program has built strong resources positioned to help restaurants to be more resilient, competitive, and attractive to current and future talent—and to support the sustainability of BC's foodservice industry in the years to come.

The program resources offer a scalable foundation for ongoing culture improvements across the province, fostering the conditions for a more stable, inclusive, and professional industry—one workplace at a time. The Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift, The Operator Toolkit and online self assessment are available to all restaurateurs province-wide at [chefs-table-evaluation.web.app](https://chefs-table-evaluation.web.app) and the Chefs' Table Society website [chefstabletsociety.com](https://chefstabletsociety.com). CTS is available as a resource to support implementation through the Culinary Centre starting in October 2025.

Chefs' Table Society of BC is based in Vancouver on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) people. We are on a journey to learn more about First Nations cooking and ingredients - and we look forward to sharing our passion for the food of our lands with others who share this journey.

*The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of its author(s) and not the official policy or position of the Government of British Columbia.*

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Project Purpose:

To pilot solutions (including learning events, a guide to culture shift, and individual action plans for restaurants across British Columbia) that will improve workplace culture and decrease employee turnover in the foodservices industry to help restaurants across British Columbia better retain and attract the talent they need to thrive and grow.



## DEFINITIONS

**Workplace Culture:** The shared set of values, beliefs, behaviours, and practices that shape how employees interact, perform, and collaborate. It reflects the organization's priorities, leadership style, and work environment—and influences employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

**People (or Employee) Playbook:** A game plan for how people are guided to succeed within the restaurant or eatery's culture. It combines policies, procedures, and expectations with strategies and tools that make those guidelines actionable. It goes beyond a handbook by offering dynamic, culture-driven resources that train and empower staff.

**Restaurants and Eateries:** Encompasses all types of food and beverage establishments—restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, tea houses, diners, bakeries, catering companies and food trucks. We chose the wording to showcase the intention for the toolkit to have broad application across the foodservice sector.

**Shared Values:** The beliefs, priorities, and guiding principles that define a restaurant's identity and how it operates. They represent what the business cares about—both in the food and service it delivers and in the way it treats its staff and community. When employees' personal values align with those of the restaurant, it strengthens engagement, motivation, and a sense of belonging. Shared values can include everything from a commitment to sustainability, local sourcing, or culinary authenticity, to prioritizing work-life balance, staff well-being, and respectful collaboration.

## Building on Past Research to Meet Today's Workforce Challenges

This project builds on previous work conducted by the go2HR (2016) and the BC Restaurant and Foodservices Association (2018). **Metro Vancouver Restaurant Labour Shortage Report and Recommendations** begins with:

*The restaurant business is fast-paced. To ensure that every customer is served promptly and as ordered, every member of every team – wait staff, kitchen, front of house, back of house, etc. – must work together to pull off miracles every day.*

This statement holds especially true in today's context. It captures the essence of the restaurant industry's unique challenges: evolving consumer demands, rising operational costs, and the extraordinary effort it takes from each team member to deliver outstanding hospitality.

While exceptional service remains the cornerstone of BC's vibrant restaurant industry, the numbers tell a deeper story. Between September 2023 and 2024, BC's restaurant and accommodation sector lost 10,800 jobs, reaching its lowest employment levels since 2016 according to Restaurants Canada. Nationally, foodservice represents 1 in every 6 private-sector job vacancies. These realities highlight a vital truth: industry resilience and long-term success depends on successful retention and recruitment and that is intimately tied with how we treat our people.

## Key Actions included in the project mandate:

- Partner with other industry associations to pilot solutions that improve workplace culture.
- Organize learning events and provide speakers at existing industry events in order to encourage dialogue on how to improve the restaurant workplace culture.
- Meet with at least 95 individual SME restaurants ensuring representation across at least 5 different economic development regions in BC.
- Observe and assess each participating restaurant's current workplace culture.
- Produce a Guide to Culture Shift including tips and tricks for improving workplace culture.
- Develop public materials that help all BC restaurants assess and enhance their workplace culture.
- Set up the project to thrive on a sustainable basis beyond the pilot.

## Within the set of restaurants consulted, the mix included:

- Single-unit independent operators with small-to-medium staff teams
- Single-location restaurants with large staff cohorts and complex operations
- Multi-location operators with 2 or more restaurants of the same concept, each with their own team
- Multi-concept operators with different types of businesses and staff teams
- Seasonal businesses, for whom strong hiring and onboarding systems are crucial due to high annual turnover
- Catering-focused businesses with large teams of casual workers and off-site operations
- Businesses that operate within larger operations (golf courses/hotels/private clubs) some of which are union environments.

The single biggest group of businesses was stand-alone, single-unit operators interested in learning about best practices in people policies that can improve their operations. Some already had systems in place and want to share what works for them. Others were revamping programs or starting fresh and looking for foundational support. Most had a few areas working well but saw opportunities to strengthen their approach with new tools and guidance.



## What we've learned from meeting with restaurant owners and operators:

Clear themes emerged about what truly drives retention, engagement, and long-term sustainability in the sector. While each business had unique challenges, the following lessons stood out consistently across regions and business types. Together, they highlight the core elements of workplace culture that make the difference between constant turnover and a thriving, stable workforce.

- Open communication and genuine care are non-negotiable for resilient workplaces.
- Respect and a people-first mindset are the foundation for attracting and retaining talent.
- Work-life balance, supported by thoughtful scheduling, signals that employees' time is valued.
- Recognition and clear growth pathways strengthen long-term employer–employee relationships.
- Mental health resources are a consistent priority for both leaders and frontline staff.
- Wraparound benefits (staff meals, EAPs, community perks) boost morale and retention.
- Competitive wages matter, but culture is the deciding factor in whether employees stay.

## Turning Insights into Action:

Building on the lessons gathered from operators, our team focused on translating insights into clear, actionable steps. These recommendations were designed to be practical, adaptable to restaurants of all sizes, and easy to implement with minimal disruption. By equipping operators with tools and approaches that directly address their most pressing challenges, the program supported measurable improvements in workplace culture and laid the groundwork for lasting change.

The following recommendations were the most frequently shared with restaurants, and represent core changes that can strengthen workplace culture while supporting recruitment and retention:

- **Introducing Respectful Workplace Policies** – It's essential to set and maintain clear expectations for professional conduct while reinforcing inclusive, respectful work environments.
- **Strengthening Orientation Practices** – Providing tools such as onboarding checklists and acknowledgements ensure new hires feel welcomed, supported, and set up for success.
- **Supporting Performance and Feedback** – Simple evaluation grids and coaching templates make feedback more consistent, constructive, and easy to manage.
- **Promoting Workplace Health and Well-being** – Normalizing conversations around health and safety, sick leave (illness and injury leave) and mental health aligns your restaurant culture with BC employment standards and WorkSafeBC.
- **Encouraging Growth and Development Pathways** – Highlighting opportunities for skill-building, recognition, and advancement strengthen long-term staff engagement.
- **Leveraging Benefits Beyond Wages** – Staff meals, employee assistance programs (EAPs), or other wraparound supports boost retention and showcase a professional commitment to staff well-being.

We recognize that a people-first culture alone doesn't eliminate the challenges of long hours and fast-paced service. But it does reshape the employee experience—demonstrating that employees are not just workers, but valued contributors in shared goals and shared successes.

## From Recommendations to Results:

Through our extensive research and listening process, the project captured the questions, concerns, and ideas that mattered most to the industry. Out of this engagement, we developed three enduring resources: the **Restaurant Workplace Culture Toolkit**, the **Online Self-Assessment** and the **Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift**. These tools are a lasting legacy of the program and are freely available to any restaurant operator through the **Chefs' Table Society of BC website**, ensuring the project's insights continue to support the sector into the future.

This project provides multiple pathways for operators to engage with, access, and implement these resources. Recognizing that people adopt change in different ways, we deployed strategies designed to accommodate varied learning styles, schedules, and comfort levels. To connect with employers, we hosted group sessions, conducted one-on-one meetings, and offered an online self-assessment. This flexible approach encouraged authentic participation and ensured that every operator could engage in a way that worked for them.

The same philosophy underpins the final resources. The Toolkit, the Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift, and the self-assessment process are all designed for independent, on-demand use, allowing restaurant leaders to engage on their own terms. All resources are editable Word-documents, colour-coded and built for practical, quick implementation, so restaurants can immediately begin strengthening workplace culture, improving retention, and empowering their teams.

### How operators can use the Toolkit and Guide:

- **Implement Clear Policies:** Use ready-to-go templates for Respectful Workplace and DEIB-aligned practices.
- **Onboard and Train Effectively:** Apply structured checklists and guides to set new hires up for success.
- **Support Well-Being:** Access strategies for scheduling, mental health, and wraparound benefits.
- **Manage Performance Consistently:** Use simple evaluation grids and coaching tools for constructive feedback.
- **Foster Belonging:** Promote respect, inclusion, and shared values across the team.
- **Sustain Positive Change:** Translate insights into daily operations for lasting cultural improvements.

### Project Impact Summary:

Together, the research, consultations, and development of the Toolkit and Guide demonstrate a comprehensive approach to strengthening workplace culture in British Columbia's restaurant sector. By translating insights into practical, accessible tools, the project equips operators to implement meaningful changes that improve staff engagement, retention, and well-being. These resources, with the Online Self-Assessment, ensure that the program's impact extends beyond individual consultations, providing a lasting, scalable framework that supports healthier, more resilient workplaces across the industry.



# PROJECT LEADERSHIP: CHEFS' TABLE SOCIETY OF BC

When the **Chefs' Table Society of BC (CTS)** was founded more than 20 years ago, the idea of the society was to promote the sustainability of local BC based food and beverage so that as the restaurant industry grew, so would the emerging BC food and agriculture scene. The thought was that the ingredients would tell our unique story. With that clear local focus, chefs and restaurateurs got together to create a platform for regional excellence with events like the Spot Prawn Festival <https://spotprawnfestival.com/> and the Wild Salmon Celebration. Over the years, CTS published two cookbooks that featured recipes from a wide stable of BC chefs using BC ingredients to empower and inspire the home cook.

Over two decades, as CTS has seen the platform for BC ingredients grow, we identified the need to start a new conversation around what sustainability means. The heart of the conversation is a critical question: **What are we doing to help sustain the workers who craft these fantastic local ingredients into great dishes?**



## Many supporting questions powered CTS board discussions:

- How can CTS contribute to fulfilling careers, and personal and professional growth?
- How can people who find their passion in food and hospitality stay longer in jobs they love?
- Can we empower our colleagues to have open and honest conversation about mental health at work?

Out of these conversations CooksCamp <https://cookscamp.ca/> was born. The 2-day event is a platform for restaurant professionals to invest in people development while feasting on the bounty of BC. This project allows CTS to take the next step toward industry sustainability in tangible ways by providing operators with real tools to help them on their journey of supporting staff in this time of change.

With the help of the board, the project Governance Committee and industry experts, the project team of Shawna Gardham and Samantha Scholefield led the direct outreach to the industry. Through one-on-one discussions, small or medium sized restaurants across the province shared their stories: some operators highlighted their stories of people successes and others relayed stories of challenges. Many operators came to the discussion with curiosity and no expectations – simply being open to new ideas and seeking knowledge and tools that might help them strengthen workplace culture.

## Project Implementation Team



### Shawna Gardham

*Executive Director,  
Chefs' Table Society of BC*

Shawna combines hospitality management experience with people-focused leadership in her role with CTS. With a background in restaurant operations and team coaching, she understands the challenges and opportunities facing BC's hospitality sector. She leads industry-shaping programs including the Workplace Culture Shift initiative, CTS Mentorship Program, CooksCamp, and the BC Spot Prawn Festival, working with restaurateurs and entrepreneurs to strengthen workplace culture, improve performance, and build sustainable success.



### Samantha Scholefield

*Program Manager*

Samantha is dedicated to leadership development, workforce engagement, and celebrating local excellence in BC's hospitality sector.

She has led initiatives to strengthen leadership, boost retention, and connect with future talent, including the Metro Vancouver Restaurant Labour Shortage SLMP, where she engaged one-on-one with employers, employees and students studying to join the hospitality and foodservice industries. Her work spans national conferences and programs such as Eat Drink Local and the Island Taste Trail, showcasing BC's food and beverage community while inspiring pride and passion across the industry.

**We acknowledge the contribution of all the talented, enthusiastic owners, operators, leaders, and professionals who participated in this project for sharing their passion for hospitality, helping us understand a diversity of operational needs, and showing us how we can create broad-based tools that support others around the province.**



The industry leaders who joined our Governance Committee (Eva Gates, Melody McLorie, Margot Baloro, Cindy Conti, Pepe Barajas, Steve Lewis, Johnny Bridge and Robert Belcham) made this project possible. As an industry partner, go2HR was exceptional.. With experts around the province, we were able to connect each restaurant with someone in their region who can continue to support them over the long term with practical, local advice. Ryan Anderson of **Matthews, Dinsdale and Clark LLP** provided clear-eyed, approachable legal guidance that ensured our tools and templates are aligned with current federal and provincial legislation—while maintaining the clarity and accessibility needed for them to be useful to employers and employees equally.

True to CTS' approach, every project begins with setting the menu and the table. **The menu**, in this case, includes tools, templates and best practices—each offering a clear vision, defined goals, and actionable steps toward building a sustainable, people-first workplaces. **The table** is where collaboration happens: where we bring together diverse voices, resources, and expertise to turn the vision into reality.

Putting people first is an ongoing process. We invite everyone who reads this report to please share any feedback. If we have missed something, or if you have ideas that could help support other operators build stronger, more resilient workplace cultures, please contact us at [ed@chefstablesociety.com](mailto:ed@chefstablesociety.com).

With the above insights in hand, the following sections detail how the outreach was conducted, how the resources were developed, what is included, and how it will support restaurant leaders across BC going forward. Each section includes lessons learned.

# OUTREACH: BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

To build meaningful engagement across the province, we employed a multi-channel outreach strategy designed to meet restaurant operators where they already gather, learn, and connect. Our goal was to raise awareness of the program, invite participation, and ensure accessibility for all types of restaurants and eateries. We built an online presence through the Chefs' Table Society website and an interactive assessment platform through our partners at Qatalyst Research Group ("Qatalyst"), and used targeted social media outreach to reach operators in key regions including the Cariboo/Chilcotin and Kootenay/Rockies. Email newsletters from partners like go2HR, the BCRFA, and regional hospitality organizations further extended our reach to small and medium-sized businesses across British Columbia.

Direct engagement played a central role in bringing operators into the project. We collaborated with trusted local partners such as Blue Mountain Solutions, Okanagan Chefs Association, and regional tourism associations to promote the initiative and encourage participation. Operators were invited to attend regional learning events, complete the online self-assessment, and ideally connect one-on-one with our project team. Events such as the SPARK Conference, CooksCamp, and the Chefs' Table Society AGM provided opportunities to introduce the program and share its goals. Additional promotion through podcasts, media coverage (Scout Magazine, Canada's Restaurant Guy), and individual connections through the Governance Committee and the CTS board helped us reach operators in meaningful and personal ways, offering flexible ways to get involved that respected the demands of their day-to-day operations.

Business outreach resulted in varying levels of participation, reflecting the diverse capacities and priorities of operators across the province. While some businesses fully engaged with the program—completing the self-assessment, participating in one-on-one meetings, and exploring multiple tools—others connected more selectively, attending a regional event or completing the assessment without pursuing further follow-up. This spectrum of engagement underscored the importance of offering multiple, low-barrier entry points. For some operators, short, targeted engagement provided a valuable starting point to reflect on their workplace culture and consider next steps. These small touch points were generally an intro to go2HR and a specific regional HR consultant or a single template that was specific to their interest.

We believe that by meeting operators where they were—both in terms of geography and readiness—we opened the door to future improvements, even when initial participation was minimal.



## Restaurant Outreach Tactics

### Outreach for operators was completed using the following tactics:

- **TACTIC 1:** Website presence (<https://chefstablesociety.com> and <https://chefs-table-evaluation.web.app>)
- **TACTIC 2:** Social media (Chefs' Table Society). Geo-targeted social media ads were used to connect with more businesses in the Cariboo/Chilcotin and Kootenay/Rockies areas.
- **TACTIC 3:** Partner promotions/Outreach/Networking
  - Blue Mountain Solutions
  - Okanagan Chefs Association
  - BC Chefs Association
  - go2HR newsletter
  - BCRFA newsletter
  - North Vancouver Island Culinary Association
  - Vancouver Island University
  - Camosun College
  - Destination Vancouver
  - Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association
  - Visit Prince Rupert
  - Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce
  - Visit Penticton
  - Restaurant Association of Whistler
  - Nanaimo Hospitality Association
  - Sunshine Coast Tourism
  - Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
  - Williams Lake Chamber of Commerce
  - Economic Development Campbell River
  - Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism
  - Tourism Kelowna
- **TACTIC 4:** Events (SPARK Conference, CooksCamp, Chefs' Table Society Annual General Meeting, Regional Learning Events, GFS Leadership, Williams Lake Chamber of Commerce Monthly Business Meeting, Tourism Kelowna Restaurant Event)
- **TACTIC 5:** Conduct Industry Outreach Sessions (Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna)
- **TACTIC 6:** E-mail and Facebook marketing

### PLUS

- **Individual outreach**
- **Participation in Mise en Place Podcast** (feature episode promoting the program)
- **Scout Magazine** (online feature story sharing straightforward solutions for operators looking to strengthen their people policies)
- **Canada's Restaurant Guy** (Linked In and Substack feature stories sharing straightforward people-focused ideas for workplace culture)

# OUTREACH: INDUSTRY PRESENTATIONS

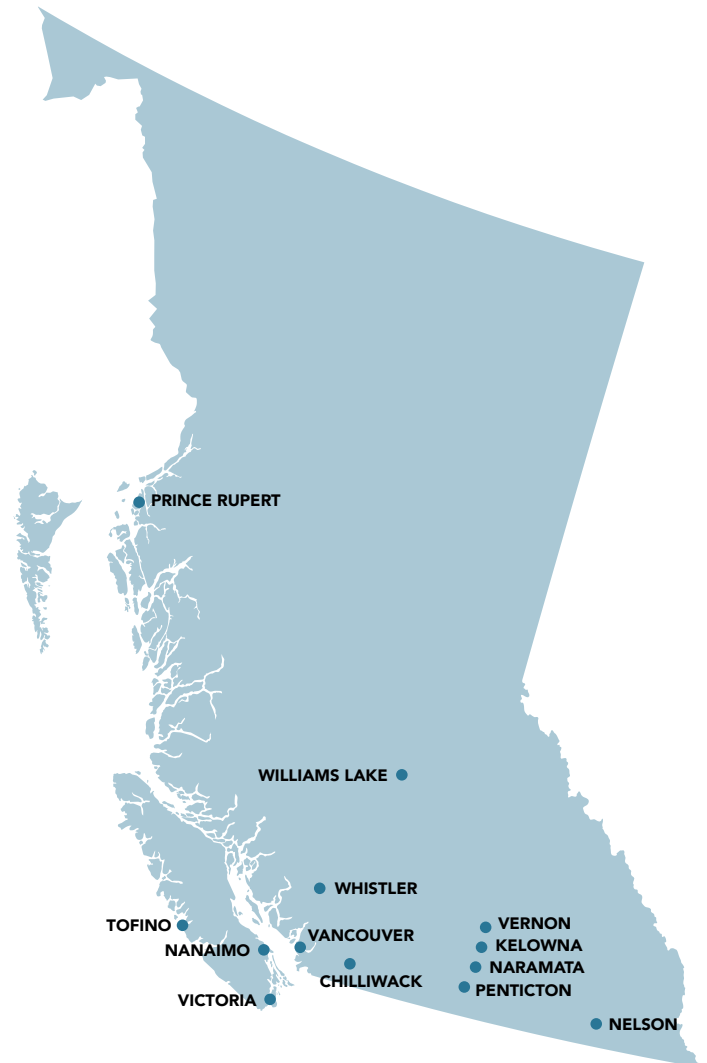
Throughout the project, industry presentations proved to be a valuable channel for raising awareness, building credibility, and connecting with restaurant operators at scale. By participating in established partner events, creating regional learning days, and partnering to hold collaborative sessions, we were able to position the program as both relevant and timely to the evolving needs of the industry.

Our outreach crisscrossed the province—from Victoria to Naramata, Prince Rupert to Delta, Whistler to Chilliwack, Vernon to Vancouver—ensuring that operators from diverse geographic and business contexts had access to the message and materials. Events such as CooksCamp, SPARK, and regional chef association meetings offered direct access to leadership-level attendees and decision-makers, while sessions in partnership with go2HR and tourism associations provided a trusted platform to address workplace culture and mental health more deeply.

These presentations helped generate new interest in the one-on-one support available through the program, with many attendees expressing interest in follow-up meetings or requesting toolkits. They also gave us insight into common challenges facing operators—from mental health in the workplace to recruitment pain points—and validated the need for simple, action-ready tools.

By the final phase of the project, the demand for presentations had begun to shift from awareness-building to more targeted knowledge-sharing. For example, requests from foodservice suppliers and leadership groups (e.g., Gordon Food Service) demonstrated that our tools and insights were resonating beyond independent operators and into broader industry ecosystems.

In summary, industry presentations served as both a springboard for engagement and a way to normalize the conversation around workplace culture, HR tools, and leadership development in hospitality. These sessions helped embed the program's principles into the broader industry dialogue and laid the groundwork for future collaboration and cultural change.



## Regional Learning Events – Summary

Event	Program Speaker	Guest Speaker 1	Guest Speaker 2	Guest Speaker 3	# Attendees
KELOWNA Pretty Not Bad May 6	Samantha Scholefield	Ginger Brunner, go2HR	Stacy Johnson, The Restaurant at Poplar Grove	Alana Dickson, BC Hospitality Foundation	36
VANCOUVER Heritage Hall May 16	Samantha Scholefield	Cindy Conti & Erin O’Byrne, go2HR	Margaret Davies, Coast Mental Health	Johnny Bridge, Mind the Bar	29
VICTORIA Camosun College June 3	Samantha Scholefield	Nicole Howlett & Peter Charles, go2HR	Theresa Ito, Blue Mountain Solutions		31
<b>Total Attendance</b>					<b>96</b>

## Partner Events – Summary

Event	Program Speaker	# Attendees
<b>COMPLETED</b>		
COOKS CAMP, September 7, 2023	Theresa Ito (Keynote Address)	225
SPARK CONFERENCE, October 16, 2023	Theresa Ito	129
BC CHEFS’ ASSOCIATION MEETING, March 19, 2024	Samantha Scholefield	16
OKANAGAN CHEFS ASSOCIATION MEETING, April 8, 2024	Shawna Gardham	61
COOKS CAMP September 11, 2024	Erin O’Byrne, go2HR (Breakout Session)	~80
GORDON FOOD SERVICE Leadership Event, September 12, 2024	Samantha Scholefield	16
GORDON FOOD SERVICE Interior Zoom, October 30, 2024	Samantha Scholefield & Shawna Gardham	19
WHISTLER go2HR EVENT, January 23, 2025	Samantha Scholefield, Cindy Conti, Erin O’Byrne	14
WILLIAMS LAKE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EVENT, February 27. 2025	Samantha Scholefield and Christie Blaquiere (go2HR)	32
go2HR/TOURISM KELOWNA, March 27, 2025	Samantha Scholefield, Ginger Brunner, Jacqui Dowling (Tourism Kelowna)	22
<b>Total Attendance</b>		<b>614</b>

## Restaurant Outreach Learnings

### Successes

Over the course of the project, industry outreach proved to be a valuable vehicle for generating awareness and interest among restaurant operators across the province. Presentations at partner events and regional gatherings allowed us to introduce the program's tools and approach to a wide cross-section of the industry, from independent restaurateurs to supplier networks and tourism associations.

While our final round of partner outreach presentations in Whistler, Kelowna and Williams Lake did not lead to immediate one-on-one meetings, they successfully engaged informed operators who demonstrated genuine interest in the program's goals and the hands-on nature of our resources.

Notably, the offer of in-person, individualized support continued to stand out as a unique and appreciated feature of the initiative.

In response to emerging needs, we developed a new Zoom presentation format tailored for operators who are unable or hesitant to commit to in-person meetings. The virtual format provided a comprehensive overview of the toolkit, organized by theme and colour-coded for clarity, and allowed us to showcase specific, high-impact tools in a streamlined way. This adaptation gives the program added flexibility for ongoing outreach beyond the delivery phase.



### Challenges

Despite strong engagement during live presentations, converting industry outreach into booked in-person follow-ups was challenging in certain regions. In particular, outreach in Williams Lake and Whistler generated enthusiasm but has yet to yield sustained engagement. We also continued to face barriers to connection in regions such as the Cariboo Chilcotin and Kootenay Rockies, where access to operators often requires a local champion or trusted intermediary.

The labour shortage/time crunch operators continue to face is a hurdle to getting one-on-one time and there is no tangible solution to this. That said, we know that if we get in front of businesses, we have strong tools that will benefit them. We just can't force them to see us in person.

The nature of the hospitality industry places a high value on polish and presentation. With this in mind, some operators are hesitant to openly discuss areas of concern for fear of appearing unprofessional or giving light to challenges. In these cases, having tools to share has opened a few extra doors. People are more open to talking openly about tools and how they can be implemented rather than about the unique challenges in their business.



## Mitigation Strategies

To address these challenges, we adapted our outreach tactics to improve follow-up success and accessibility:

- We introduced scheduling flexibility for operators, allowing us to work around the shifting demands of restaurant operations.
- We recruited a trusted operator to serve as a beta tester for our new Zoom presentation. Their feedback helped refine both the structure and content delivery, ensuring that the digital format remained efficient, personalized, and relevant.
- We adjusted the Zoom slides to prioritize quality over quantity—highlighting a small number of tools per section and offering targeted previews rather than full document walkthroughs. This helped make virtual meetings more engaging and responsive to individual needs.

## Lessons Learned

One of the key lessons from our outreach efforts is that awareness and interest did not always translate into action—particularly in regions where operators may be stretched thin or where external champions are lacking. Local credibility and trust remain essential for deep engagement.

We also learned that digital outreach tools must be purpose-built, not repurposed. Our shift to a streamlined Zoom format demonstrated that operators are open to virtual learning—so long as the delivery is concise, flexible, and customized to their immediate concerns.

Finally, we recognize that as the program gains visibility and the full toolkit becomes available, word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer referrals are the strongest drivers of continued adoption. Supporting these organic connections will be key to sustaining momentum beyond the life of the project.



# RESTAURANT ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

The one-on-one meetings were at the heart of our engagement strategy, providing a low-effort, high-value opportunity for restaurant operators to connect and explore solutions tailored to their workplace culture needs. The idea was that our CTS project team would do the logistics work, and only ask the restaurant team to invest the time to meet and be introduced to a range of available solutions. These meetings not only shaped the development of the toolkit but also laid the foundation for continued uptake and improvement of people-first practices.

The majority of the meetings were conducted by Samantha Scholefield and Shawna Gardham. go2HR's Cindy Conti, Erin O'Bryne and Ginger Brunner attended in key markets to support the outreach.

Meetings were held in a wide range of businesses across British Columbia—from independent cafés, bakeries, and caterers to brewpubs, casual dining rooms, farm-to-table bistros, and fine dining establishments. Operators ranged from new owners (as recent as 7 months in) to long-established restaurateurs with 20 and 30 years of experience. We had operators facing upcoming transitions: from taking over established businesses and working to personalize them, operators evolving their concept from finer dining to casual service to meet the moment and others who were looking to grow their businesses through franchising and/or additional locations. This diversity brought rich perspectives and helped us ensure the tools we developed would be relevant to a broad spectrum of business models and operational styles.

## Regional Meeting Breakdown:

Lower Mainland Chilliwack to Delta to Whistler	Vancouver Island and Coast Tofino to Campbell River to Victoria	Thompson-Okanagan Naramata to Vernon to Blue River
68	41	22
Kootenay Nelson	North Coast Prince Rupert	Cariboo Williams Lake
2	7	3 (Note: package only not included in 140 total)

## Business Reach:

1:1 Meetings in Person	1:1 Meetings Virtual	Online Assessment Only
83	4	14
Total Assessments	1:1 Meetings Total Restaurant Reach	Assessments Total Reach
101	140	154
Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Counter Service
49	48	35
Single / Stand Alone Operation	Multi-Unit (Same or Different Concept)	Catering
58	82	15

\* Some Restaurants had multiple delivery styles so the total number of units touched and units by style does not match.

## One-on-one Assessments

The one-on-one assessments included a presentation of the project and a detailed discussion of each business's current people policies and procedures. Working collaboratively with the owner/operator/leader, the project team identified areas where specific program tools would provide the most benefit. During these sessions, available tools were introduced and explained in context, allowing operators to see immediate practical applications for their workplace.

Every business that participated in a one-on-one meeting received a comprehensive follow up package of 20 tools in March 2025, regardless of when their original participation took place. They received a subsequent update at the end of May with an additional 10 tools that were finalized over April and May. These follow-ups reinforced learning, supported the adoption of best practices, and ensured all operators had access to the full suite of resources to implement meaningful workplace changes.



## Online Assessments

→ 14 online only assessments

By completing the online form, businesses provided a current overview of their people policies and procedures, as well as areas where they identified a need for supporting tools or templates. Although intending to trigger one-on-one meetings, this pathway was preferred by some operators as it offered flexibility for those who could not engage in a scheduled one-on-one session thus ensuring broader participation and inclusivity across the sector.

These online participants received the same follow-up support as in-person participants, including a full package of 20 tools in March 2025 and a subsequent update of 10 additional tools at the end of May. This consistent follow-up helped maximize the impact of the program across all participating businesses, regardless of engagement style, and demonstrates the scalability of the resources for ongoing use in BC's restaurant sector.

In the online assessment count, we did not include people who participated in only the preliminary online assessment as this was a less robust assessment process. In addition, online assessments are counted as 1 unit even if they have multiple operations under the company umbrella.

## Connecting Assessments to Program Outcomes

By combining one-on-one and online assessment approaches, the project ensured that restaurant operators of all sizes, types, and locations could engage with the program in a way that suited their needs. These assessments provided critical insights into current people practices, allowed operators to identify priority areas for improvement, and directly guided the creation of the Toolkit and Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift.

The structured follow-up with comprehensive tool packages reinforced learning, encouraged adoption of best practices, and highlighted tangible ways operators could make measurable improvements in their workplace culture. Together, these engagement methods demonstrate a scalable and accessible approach that maximizes the project's impact across British Columbia's restaurant sector.

## First 10 Restaurant Meetings (Phase 1):

The first 10 meetings were exploratory. We were in listening mode—gathering insights, learning about common challenges, and understanding how operators defined success when it came to people practices. This input was foundational in shaping the development of our Toolkit and testing the online assessment tool.

We learned that operators were looking for clarity, simple processes, and practical supports they could adapt quickly into daily operations. These early conversations revealed both the urgent need for tools and the barriers operators faced in prioritizing people practices amid the demands of day-to-day business.

There was a noticeable lag time for some businesses that connected with us in this early phase of the project. During those months, our focus was on information gathering, and while early participants helped shape the direction of the Toolkit, they didn't have immediate access to the solutions we would later offer. As a result, some early participants seem to have less engagement—or our follow up outreach got lost amid busy inboxes and competing priorities.

These early learnings helped us refine our engagement approach. By offering multiple access points—one-on-one follow-ups, group sessions, and an online self-assessment—we created more flexible and sustained ways for operators to connect. The early input continues to pay off: the Toolkit and Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift directly reflect the challenges and priorities voiced in these initial meetings, ensuring that the resources are relevant, practical, and grounded in real industry experience.

## 2024 Restaurant Meetings (Phase 2):

As the project progressed and more resources were finalized, the nature of these meetings evolved. We were able to shift from discovery to delivery—offering practical tools and solutions during the conversations, tailored to the specific needs of each business. This phase demonstrated how the project could move from insight-gathering to actionable impact.

Operators who engaged later in the project benefited from a growing suite of tools and templates available for preview. The ability to showcase practical, ready-to-use resources helped hesitant operators understand the tangible value of participating before committing to a meeting. This solution-focused approach led to more robust conversations during one-on-one sessions and contributed to increased word-of-mouth referrals from participants who found the tools useful, relevant, and directly applicable to their operations.

These individualized sessions not only helped build trust but also created space for meaningful around workplace culture change. For some businesses, the meetings validated existing strong practices; for others, they served as a catalyst for adopting new policies, procedures and approaches. By meeting owners and managers in a way that respected their time, realities, and aspirations, the project reinforced its core principle: that small, strategic steps, backed by the right tools, can lead to lasting improvements in workplace culture.

Most operators recognized the importance of clear, documented processes and procedures as critical drivers of strong workplace culture. We observed a broad spectrum of practices, from operations with no formal policies in place to those with nearly complete Employee Handbooks. Almost all businesses, even those with existing handbooks or compilations of policies and procedures, identified opportunities to review, improve and update their documents, demonstrating that the Toolkit that was being assembled provided value across varying levels of organization maturity.

This phase reinforced a key project insight: when operators are equipped with practical, adaptable tools and supported through one-on-one guidance, they are more likely to adopt sustainable workplace practices that improve staff engagement, retention, and overall operational resilience.



## 2025 Restaurant Meetings (Phase 3 – Post-Toolkit Launch):

The final phase of one-on-one meetings took place after the Toolkit and Guide to Culture Shift were largely finalized. During these sessions, operators had direct access to the complete suite of resources, allowing discussions to focus on implementation, customization, and real-world application. We were able to share how the tools could be adapted to their unique operations, ranging from small counter-service establishments to fine dining venues, and from urban to rural contexts.

These conversations highlighted the practical value of the resources. As the Toolkit became more robust, operators became more invested in the conversations because they saw tangible (and immediate) value in at least one of the tools provided. Operators identified clear pathways for them to action change, either through revising policies, improving onboarding, establishing clear performance evaluations practices, and strengthening staff engagement strategies. The sessions also reinforced the importance of belonging, respect, and shared values in cultivating a positive workplace culture.

Through to the last 5 one-on-one meetings, operators provided additional insights that resulted in improvements to the resources and new tools being added to the Toolkit in response to their needs.

Phase 3 demonstrated that providing ready-to-use, accessible resources combined with personalized guidance enables operators to translate recommendations into meaningful change. It also confirmed the Toolkit and Guide's scalability and relevance across diverse business types, ensuring the project's impact extends well beyond individual meetings and supports ongoing improvements across the BC restaurant sector.

## One-on-one Meetings Learnings

### Successes

Over the course of the project, one-on-one meetings consistently demonstrated the value and relevance of the program. Engagement was facilitated by bringing sample policy templates to the discussions, allowing us to address both high-level strategies and specific, real-world situations. Many managers and leaders were surprised—and appreciative—to learn about free, confidential support available through go2HR and Mind the Bar, which connected operators to resources they hadn't known existed. The strength of the program team and the leadership of the Chefs' Table Society around promoting careers in culinary and hospitality were also critical, ensuring conversations were grounded in industry realities and that operators felt supported by peers who understood their day-to-day challenges.

The program met operators where they were. Many had been navigating workplace issues in isolation, and the materials and conversations provided a turning point. Tools such as the **Respectful Workplace Policy** offered a practical, approachable way to reinforce DEIB best practices through a culture of respect and fairness. **Employee rating tools**, used for both hiring and early-stage performance, were particularly well received for simplifying coaching conversations and supporting consistent evaluation with minimal time investment.

Following-up with a comprehensive 20-tool downloadable package in March 2025 reinforced engagement, ensured early participants could immediately apply the resources. Operators consistently reported that the sample policies provided clear language and structure, making it easier to address sensitive issues and strengthen fairness and professionalism in their workplaces.

Community-level partners and local businesses proved highly effective in connecting us to new operators. Back-to-back meetings in communities such as Penticton, Kelowna, Vernon, Whistler, and Prince Rupert generated strong engagement and offered a deeper understanding of common workplace challenges across BC. These consecutive sessions also allowed us to test and refine our tools in real time, ensuring relevance across a wide range of business types and sizes.

## Challenges

While interest in the program was strong, converting that interest into scheduled, in-person meetings remained a challenge in areas without a local champion. Efforts to build momentum through group presentations (e.g., at a Chamber luncheon in Williams Lake) generated engagement, but follow-up did not always result in in-person meetings.

Additionally, the unpredictable nature of restaurant operations made it difficult for some businesses to commit to or keep scheduled meetings, leading to delays or repeated rescheduling. These operational realities highlighted the importance of flexible engagement options and multiple pathways for participation.

## Mitigation Strategies

To address these issues, we shifted from an information-sharing model to a hands-on, action-oriented approach. We prioritized tools that operators could implement with minimal training or background knowledge. We were also responsive to specific asks: we created a Mobile Phone Use Policy, a Social Media Policy and a Basic Contract with confidentiality clauses, all in response to individual operator questions/needs. Once developed, these policies were shared broadly, resonating for many other operators across the province.

We also expanded the toolkit to better address the widespread impact of mental health challenges in the workforce. Our tools provided a framework for setting expectations, reducing reactivity, and improving communication. Where needed, we made direct referrals to go2HR's Mental Health team to support owners in navigating more complex staff needs.

The evolution of the program toward customizable, easy-to-edit Word templates—organized in a user-friendly, colour-coded format—was a direct response to operator feedback and played a key role in the program's overall success and the usability of the tools.

## Lessons Learned

By the end of the project, it was clear that simplicity and actionability are essential for engagement. Operators overwhelmingly preferred tools that were ready to use, easy to edit, and relevant to their immediate challenges. Every document had minimal branding and instructions limited to the first 1 or 2 pages that could be deleted once read—ensuring maximum utility and ease of customization.

While some operators came with targeted HR questions, the majority benefited from foundational tools that addressed common, recurring challenges. Several businesses requested customized sessions for their broader management teams—a positive indicator of the program's credibility and effectiveness.

Peer connection emerged as a particularly powerful factor. The strongest new leads came from operators who had already participated and recommended the program. As the toolkit matured, operators were willing to talk about the project with their colleagues, reinforcing the value of trust building through one-on-one engagement and high-quality, practical tools.

## Overall Impact

The iterative approach to challenges and mitigation reinforced the program's core philosophy: by listening to operators, responding to their needs, and providing practical, adaptable tools, meaningful change in workplace culture is achievable. Lessons learned through one-on-one engagement informed refinements to the toolkit and templates, increasing usability, relevance, and adoption across the province. The combination of direct support, peer referrals, and accessible resources helped restaurants implement positive, lasting changes in their policies, practices, and culture—creating a foundation for ongoing workforce resilience and stronger, people-focused operations throughout BC's restaurant sector.



## Did the One-on-one meetings confirm a need for these tools?

Absolutely—our conversations confirmed that restaurant operators recognize the need for stronger people policies and procedures but often lack the information, time, or confidence to act. Whether it was individuals who are new to ownership or entrepreneurs decades into owning a restaurant, many described navigating people challenges alone, without a clear roadmap or trusted guidance. While most saw culture as essential to retention and long-term success, formal policy work remained on the back burner. Our project addressed this gap directly.

### Across all our one-on-one meetings, we found:

- Limited awareness of industry supports like go2HR's regional HR consultants and mental health services like Mind the Bar.
- Confusion between publicly funded support (e.g., go2HR) and for-profit HR service providers promoted through Chambers, BIAs, and industry associations.
- Assumptions about cost. Many operators assumed help must come with a price tag—even when it's advertised as free. (\*both this program and others)
- Perceived time burden. Policy work was seen as too daunting to start, and therefore was left indefinitely on the back burner.

### Many operators informed that they had people-policy work on their to-do lists—some had even started—but between lack of time, knowledge, or confidence, they hadn't made progress. They reported:

- Difficulty finding the right information online: Web searches often led to confusing, irrelevant, or overly technical results.
- Frustration with terminology: Using the "wrong" keywords brought up paid services or out-of-province results (Ontario, US sources rather than BC specific sources).
- Lack of trusted sources: Even when resources were found, operators weren't sure if they were credible or current, and they had no "real" person to ask.

### What stood out was how few operators had ever used—or even been introduced to—available supports:

- Only 5 businesses had engaged go2HR before our meetings, including one with prior go2HR board involvement.
- Just 2 businesses had used Mind the Bar's free staff support tools.
- Several operators hadn't heard of these services at all, or mistakenly believed they involved fees.
- Many had either not known about, or known about but never used, HR partner programs offered through associations like BCRFA, ABLE BC or Chambers of Commerce.

This clearly signals the need not just for tools, but for active outreach, clear navigation, and trusted introductions. That's where our one-on-one meetings proved most powerful. They didn't just surface needs—they connected operators to the right resources, at the right time. This was especially impactful when we made introductions to go2HR's regional HR Consultants and Mental Health & Psychological Safety Consultants.

When we were able to show operators what our tools looked like and how easy they were to customize—and they learned that the toolkit was free and the process confidential—their mindset often shifted. It turned policy work from an abstract or intimidating task into something approachable, relevant, and doable. That said, the single biggest factor that seemed to influence engagement was ease of execution. Operators resonated most with simple tools that they can action right away.

## Business Distribution Table (Region & Service Model)

Location	Region					Ownership/ Leadership Diversity			Restaurant Style			
	Lower Mainland	Vancouver Island & Coast	Thompson Okanagan	North Coast	Kootenay	POC	Indigenous	Woman O/O	Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Catering	Counter Service
Victoria		1				1			1			
Mill Bay		1							1			
Pender Island		1							1			
Pender Island		1										1
Port Renfrew		1							1			
Langley	1					1			1			
Courtenay		1						1		1		
Vancouver	1					1		1		1		
Vancouver	1					1		1		1		
Vancouver	1									1		
Nanaimo		1				1		1		1		
North Vancouver	1					1				1		
Langley	1										1	1
Maple Ridge	1					1		1			1	
Vancouver	1							1			1	1
Victoria		1								1		
Victoria		1							1			
Victoria		1										1
Victoria		1										1
Vancouver	1									1		
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1											1
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
Victoria												
Vancouver												

	Lower Mainland	Vancouver Island & Coast	Thompson Okanagan	North Coast	Kootenay	POC	Indigenous	Woman O/O	Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Catering	Counter Service
Whistler	2	1										3
Vancouver	1											1
Vancouver	1								1			1
Kelowna			1						1			
Penticton			1					1		1		
Vancouver	3					1			2		1	
Vancouver	1							1			1	1
Penticton			1					1		1		
Penticton			1								1	1
Kelowna			1							1		
Kelowna			1									1
West Kelowna			1								1	
Big White			1						1			
Kelowna			1							1		
Kelowna			1						1			
West Kelowna			1							1		
West Kelowna			1							1		
Kelowna			1					1	1			
Kelowna			1					1		1		
Kelowna			1						1		1	
Sooke		1								1		
Penticton			1						1			
Prince Rupert				1				1		1		
Prince Rupert				1		1				1		
Prince Rupert				1			1					1
Prince Rupert				1			1			1		
Prince Rupert				1					1			
Prince Rupert				1		1		1	1			
Prince Rupert				1				1				1
Courtenay		1						1		1		
Courtenay		1				1			1			

	Lower Mainland	Vancouver Island & Coast	Thompson Okanagan	North Coast	Kootenay	POC	Indigenous	Woman O/O	Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Catering	Counter Service
Sechelt	1					1		1			1	1
Whistler	1					1				1		
Whistler	1					1				1		
Whistler	2					2						2
Whistler	1					1					1	
Whistler	1									1		
Whistler	1					1		1		1		
Whistler	1					1		1				1
Whistler	1					1		1				1
Sechelt	1							1	1			
Vancouver	1							1	1			
Nanaimo		1						1		1		
Nanaimo		1						1				1
Nanaimo		1						1			1	
Courtenay		1						1	1			
Ladner	1							1	1			
Tsawwassen	1							1	1			
Tsawwassen	1							1		1		
Tsawwassen	1											1
Burnaby	1							1				1
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
Langley	1							1	1			
Langley	1							1	1			
Vernon			1							1		
Vernon			1							1		
Vernon			1								1	
Victoria		1								1		
Ladner	1								1			
Steveston	1								1			

	Lower Mainland	Vancouver Island & Coast	Thompson Okanagan	North Coast	Kootenay	POC	Indigenous	Woman O/O	Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Catering	Counter Service
Lake Country			1						1			
Chilliwack	1							1		1		
Vancouver	1							1		1		
Chilliwack	1							1			1	
Chilliwack	1										1	
Chilliwack	1										1	
Vancouver	1					1		1		1		
Vancouver	1									1		
Vancouver	1								1			
Vancouver	1								1			
UBC	1									1		
Ladner	1							1		1		
Royston		1						1				1
Cumberland		1							1			
Cumberland		1										1
Cumberland		1										1
Victoria		1						1		1		
Tofino		1								1		
Tofino		1								1		
Royston		1						1	1			
Vancouver	2									2		
Qualicum Beach		1								1		
Vancouver	1									1		
NanOOSE Bay		1								1		
Qualicum Beach		1							1			
NanOOSE		1							1			
Qualicum Beach		1						1				1
Victoria		1				1			1			
Victoria/Oak Bay/ Royal Oak		3				3			3			
Blue River			1							1		

Blue River			1							1		
Port Moody	1					1						1
Whistler	1							1				1
Vancouver	1							1				1
Burnaby	1							1				1
Victoria		1								1		
Victoria		2							1	1		
Victoria		1							1			
Vancouver	1					1						1
Nelson								1				1
Vancouver	1				1			1		1		
Port Moody	1							1				1
Nelson					1				1			
<b>TOTALS</b>	Lower Mainland	Vancouver Island & Coast	Thompson Okanagan	North Coast	Kootenay	POC	Indigenous	Woman O/O	Casual Dining + Pub Style	Full Service + Fine Dining	Catering	Counter Service
	<b>68</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>

# Three Focus Areas for Transformative Change

In addition to broad engagement through one-on-one meetings and online assessments, the project devoted significant resources to three priority areas that are critical to creating resilient, people-first workplaces in BC's restaurant sector.

These areas—Mental Health at Work, Celebrating Shared Values, and the Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)—were prioritized because they directly influence employee well-being, engagement, and retention.

By tackling these topics in depth, the project provided operators with practical tools, guidance, and frameworks to address some of the most pressing challenges in workplace culture. These efforts went beyond basic policy advice, offering strategies that could be implemented at the operational level to create lasting, positive change for both staff and the business as a whole.

## FOCUS 1:

### **Mental Health at Work**

Recognizing that the well-being of staff is foundational to operational success, our focus was on strategies to support mental health in restaurant workplaces. Operators were provided with direct introductions to the supportive resources of go2HR and Mind The Bar as well as best practices and policy templates to help reduce stress, tackle sick leave, and foster a supportive environment that prioritizes employee wellness.

## FOCUS 2:

### **Celebrating Shared Values in the Workplace**

Shared values are a powerful driver of employee engagement, retention, and alignment with a restaurant's mission. Our focus was on highlighting how operators can identify, communicate, and embed their core values—whether around cuisine, sustainability, or community—into daily operations to attract like-minded team members and create a stronger sense of belonging.

## FOCUS 3:

### **Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**

We focused on how restaurants can foster inclusive, equitable workplaces where all employees feel valued and supported. By providing practical templates and guidance on embedding DEIB principles and a focus on belonging, we provided a framework for operators to create policies that set expectations for both leadership and staff, enhancing organizational culture and team cohesion.

## FOCUS 1: Mental Health at Work

Across our in-person meetings with operators, one of the most consistent and urgent challenges identified by restaurant owners and operators was the growing impact of mental health on staffing, performance, and workplace dynamics. Employers reported rising instances of employees struggling with anxiety, burnout, trauma, and depression—often without clear pathways to address these challenges effectively or compassionately. In many cases, restaurant leaders were left uncertain about their legal responsibilities, hesitant about how to respond to disclosures, and unsure how to maintain operational stability while supporting staff well-being.

### Supporting Restaurant Employers Through a New Era of Workplace Challenges

Recognizing this critical and under-resourced need, we determined that we needed to respond directly to these concerns. We decided to dedicate significant attention to mental health in the workplace, integrating it as a core focus of our education programs and support strategy. The speaker programs for the events and discussions in Kelowna, Vancouver, and Victoria were focused to include content that would help employers understand the role of psychological health and safety in hospitality, reduce stigma, and build the confidence and clarity needed to respond constructively to staff mental health challenges.

To deliver this content meaningfully, we partnered with **go2HR** and engaged their psychological health and safety specialists to help employers. Their experts brought both clinical knowledge and frontline understanding of the industry, offering operators practical tools, policy guidance, and leadership strategies tailored to foodservice workplaces.

Once this trend was identified, every participating restaurant received a direct email introduction to the go2HR mental health team, ensuring a personal line of support as they navigate employer responsibilities and best practices in this space. We want to thank Ginger Brunner, Nicole Howlett and Erin O’Byrne for their support, guidance and expertise in this area.

In addition to the employer-focused support provided by go2HR, we are proud to also have introduced operators to **Mind the Bar**, a grassroots organization founded within the hospitality industry to support mental health for workers. Mind the Bar offers free, employee-focused resources, including access to counselling, peer support, and mental health education tailored to the unique pressures of kitchen and front-of-house work. Their approach resonates deeply with staff, as it comes from within the industry and speaks directly to the lived experience of working in restaurants and bars. By sharing Mind the Bar’s resources alongside our program content in one-on-one meetings, we were able to offer employers tools to share with their teams and reinforce a workplace culture where staff feel seen, supported, and encouraged to seek help when needed. Thanks to Johnny Bridge and the Mind the Bar team for their front-line advocacy on behalf of employees.

By being responsive to the challenge of mental health at work, and embedding mental health into the fabric of our workplace culture program, we believe we were able to provide straightforward access for restaurant employers to not





only navigate difficult situations more confidently but also begin building long-term capacity for psychologically safer, more sustainable work environments. Overall, the response from operators to be connected to free mental health resources (both employer and employee facing) was clear: this support is not only timely, but essential for the future of the industry. Offering resources that were accessible and low and no cost made these solutions realistic options for everyone.

One important insight we gained through this work was just how limited the visibility of these existing mental health supports has been within the restaurant community. While the programs offered by go2HR and Mind the Bar are free and designed specifically for the hospitality sector, awareness of their services was surprisingly low. In 95% of the restaurants we engaged, our introduction marked the first time owners or leaders had heard of either organization or understood the supports they provide. This lack of visibility became a key learning we integrated into our approach—ensuring that direct connections were made and that these resources were framed as accessible, relevant, and immediately usable. The gap in awareness made it clear: offering the right tools isn't enough—they must also be actively introduced in context. That simple act of connection proved to be one of the most meaningful and well-received parts of our mental health support strategy.

As we move forward into further engagements with operators, the conversations we've had around mental health continue to highlight the key role that continued one-on-one outreach can play in supporting the people behind each restaurant business – from owners to dishwashers, from executive chefs to servers. The prevalence of mental health as a significant issue across the sector underscores the importance of integrating mental health education into industry programming – and reinforces how important it is to actively share resources, build awareness, and normalize conversations about mental health within the hospitality landscape.

## FOCUS 2: Celebrating Shared Values in the Workplace

**Once we met with the first 10 operators,** we identified a need to define workplace values and how we wanted to share this concept with owners/operators. For our purposes, we defined **“shared values”** as the guiding principles and priorities that shape how a restaurant operates, the decisions it makes, and the behaviours it encourages among staff. These values reflect both the mission of the restaurant/eatery and the qualities it seeks in employees, helping to align staff, culture, and customer experience. In speaking to operators, we determined that in the restaurant workplace, many of the values that guide the business are founded in a love of food, a passion for taste and a dedication to hospitality and service.

With this definition in place, one of the discussion points with operators one-on-one was the importance of identifying (followed by formalizing and then celebrating) shared values as a way to attract and retain employees. Through the meetings, it became clear that shared values are a positive force for both employers and employees.

Prior to the pandemic, evidence from the **Metro Vancouver Restaurant Labour Shortage: Report and Recommendations** already showed that restaurants with clearly defined values—such as vegetarian or vegan restaurants rooted in plant-based food—experienced fewer recruitment challenges. The alignment between an operator’s values and those of their staff created stronger attraction and retention outcomes. Our engagement with operators confirmed this pattern: when restaurants clearly documented their values, shared them widely and embodied them in their standard practices, they were more likely to attract employees who were motivated to work in alignment with those values.

Shared values may take many forms within the restaurant sector, such as a love of seafood, a passion for plant-based eating, a commitment to supporting local producers, or a dedication to sustainability. In practice, these values shape both the guest experience and the employee experience. For example, employees who value sustainability are proud to work in businesses that minimize waste and prioritize responsible sourcing. Similarly, staff who value food security are drawn to restaurants that donate surplus food to community organizations or provide staff meals to reduce waste. When restaurants act on these commitments, staff feel greater pride, purpose, and alignment in their work.

**Examples of values that we saw that positively shape workplace culture and attract like-minded workers include:**

- A love of food (e.g., seafood, plant-based, tastes/spices, or specific cuisines).
- Supporting local producers (e.g., sourcing food, wine, beer, and spirits from local suppliers).
- Commitment to sustainability (e.g., reducing food and packaging waste, sustainable takeout practices).
- Valuing employee well-being and mental health (e.g., promoting mental health days, flexible scheduling).
- Commitment to food security (e.g., staff meals, community food donations).
- Celebrating diversity and culture (e.g., menu and workplace practices that reflect multicultural influences).
- Commitment to authenticity (e.g., preserving cultural food traditions and flavours that “taste like home,” such as a sushi restaurant using traditional preparation methods or an Indian restaurant serving family-inspired recipes).
- Valuing great service and hospitality (e.g., prioritizing attentive, respectful, and memorable service to engage employees and enhance guest experiences).
- Welcoming guests from diverse backgrounds (e.g., creating an inclusive environment for guests from around the world, supporting tourism, and reflecting community diversity).
- Responding to specific food trends, diets, or sensitivities (e.g., gluten-free, keto, plant-based, or carb-focused concepts that attract staff passionate about the commitment reflected on the menu).
- Welcoming families and young children (e.g., offering a thoughtful kids’ menu and family-friendly options that attract employees who themselves have small children or grandchildren and want a place that is comfortable to bring their family to eat).





This approach does not exclude potential employees but instead provides clarity of purpose, allowing restaurants to attract individuals who are energized by the business's commitments. In a labour market where workers increasingly seek alignment between personal and organizational values, celebrating shared values is a proven recruitment and retention strategy.

Most importantly, we encouraged this approach to operators as it allows them to celebrate each individual within their team and contribute directly to **belonging**, a cornerstone of positive workplace culture. An example of this can be seen in our **Statutory Holiday Swap Policy**. This policy formalizes the opportunity for employees to swap official statutory holidays that don't resonate for them for ones that are important to their faith and/or experience (for example, swapping Christmas for Eid al-Fitr, or Indigenous People's Day for Victoria Day).

When employers are able to connect with prospective employees through shared values—whether through food choices, sustainability practices, a commitment to community, authenticity in flavours, opportunities to grow through training, hospitality standards, inclusive engagement with diverse guests, attention to dietary trends, or family-friendly practices—the employees feel a stronger sense of connection and pride. This sense of belonging supports staff engagement, reduces turnover, and strengthens the overall resilience of the restaurant sector. In this way, celebrating shared values directly advances Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) by creating workplaces where individuals feel welcomed, aligned, and empowered, while also honoring cultural authenticity, skill development, service excellence, and inclusive practices that enrich the sector and the communities it serves.

### **FOCUS 3: Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**

Across the execution of the program, we intentionally integrated Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) principles into both its design and delivery. A particular emphasis was placed on the emerging focus of belonging—introduced to our team by program expert Jastina Aujla—which we quickly recognized as a critical innovation in turning DEI principles into lived workplace experiences.

For our purposes, we defined belonging as the condition in which individuals feel accepted, valued, and supported as part of a team, and we identified it as central to creating positive and sustainable workplace culture in the restaurant sector. By framing belonging as both an organizational tone and a structural practice, we were able to encourage employers from the first one-on-one meeting to move beyond compliance-based approaches and adopt strategies that reinforce inclusivity in day-to-day operations. In general, employers understood that they need to have inclusive policies in their workplaces but were often unsure about the terminology, how to implement effective policies, or how to enforce them consistently.

Upon identifying the need to codify best practices, we developed two Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging policy templates—one higher-level and one comprehensive. Together, these templates established a clear foundation for

articulating employer commitments while setting actionable expectations for both team members and customers. They also encouraged operators to incorporate practical measures—such as equitable hiring practices, anti-discrimination policies, and community engagement—so that inclusivity was able to be part of the discussion at every level of operations.

After several months of work, the policies were completed in early 2025 and were immediately integrated into our one-on-one discussions with operators. We emphasized that a well-defined DEIB policy is not only a tool for fairness and opportunity but also a driver of trust, transparency, and stronger community connections. In positioning restaurants as forward-thinking and people-first, DEIB policies were framed as tools that support employees as individuals and enhance the restaurant’s ability to serve a diverse customer base.

However, in February and March 2025, conversations around DEIB started to become complex. While operators clearly understood the importance of belonging and inclusive practices, many expressed concern that the terminology of “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” was increasingly politicized. They worried that public use of the term could expose their businesses to backlash, particularly on social media, echoing tensions seen in the U.S. and beginning to take root in some British Columbia communities as well. This created a tension: operators wanted to lead on employee wellbeing, but feared negative attention that could undermine their efforts.

We sought to find an alternative policy that would reinforce an operator’s commitment to belonging and to fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace without the DEIB framework.

In response, our team developed our **Respectful Workplace Policy Template**. While rooted in DEIB values, this policy broadened inclusivity by addressing both employer responsibilities and employee expectations. By clearly outlining how staff are to contribute to a welcoming and respectful workplace, it fostered shared accountability and collective responsibility. This approach allowed businesses to set strong cultural standards while achieving greater buy-in from staff, ensuring inclusivity was understood as a shared practice, not just a top-down directive. This approach was strongly received, as it reframes the policy from a top-down commitment of ownership to a shared cultural expectation upheld by all team members.

Ensuring diversity among participating businesses was also a program priority. We engaged with operators across a wide spectrum: from fine dining to counter service, from large urban centres to smaller communities, and from new entrepreneurs to long-established restaurateurs. Participants included queer-owned, women-owned, Indigenous-owned, and BIPOC-owned businesses, ensuring the program reflected the true diversity of the sector. This breadth of representation enriched program outcomes, making tools and practices adaptable, relevant, and applicable across varied business models.

By embedding DEI - and particularly belonging - into our framework, the Restaurant Workplace Culture Program demonstrated that a focus on belonging and inclusivity is not only a moral imperative but also a practical business strategy and a tool for strengthening the resilience of the industry. Through a combination of policy development, shared accountability, and sector-wide representation, the changes we were able to make around our approach to DEIB across the development of the program equipped was able to be responsive to the moment while speaking to the need for employees to feel like they belong in order to thrive at work.

With 3 different policy templates that will be carried forward in the operator toolkit, restaurant operators have options for which tool they want to use to formalize their approach to inclusion and to ensure their workplace is one where staff feel valued. Each different template allows operators to be responsive, resilient and sustainable in their approach to diversity within their teams. We think this approach will help businesses thrive and, in a broader sense, will help the industry as a whole better reflect the diversity of the communities it serves.



# GUIDE TO RESTAURANT CULTURE SHIFT ("THE GUIDE")

The Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift is a stand-alone resource designed to support operators on their journey toward stronger, people-first workplaces. Rather than focusing on templates, it uses real-world scenarios and stories to help owners and managers recognize common challenges and explore practical, people-first leadership approaches. This narrative style makes the Guide both accessible and relatable for busy operators, while also ensuring the lessons are scalable and sustainable across the industry.

Drawing on insights from both operators and employees, the Guide captures the key learnings of the pilot project and presents them as a collective resource. Its purpose is to spark reflection, build awareness, and encourage culture shifts that strengthen retention, recruitment, and overall business health. To bridge learning with action, it links directly to templates within the Toolkit that help readers implement relevant changes.

**To maximize usability and reach, the digital Guide was designed with features such as:**

- A linked table of contents for easy navigation
- Section cover pages that connect to the full toolkit on the Chefs' Table Society website
- Highlighted links to tools and templates within the text
- Full website URLs for those who prefer to type links directly
- Contact information for the Chefs' Table Society and go2HR for further support



## Target Audience:

The Guide is designed for operators seeking context, insight, and a deeper understanding of why certain people practices matter, rather than simply searching for a tool. Rather than searching for a specific tool, they're looking to explore themes, principles, and real-world situations or considerations. This type of user will benefit from linked resources, background research, and practical examples that help them see the bigger picture of culture change in the restaurant industry.

Each section of the Guide can be used independently and will be integrated into the online assessment tool for more targeted reading.

## The Guide Learnings

### Successes

The Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift delivers narrative-driven content grounded in real-world restaurant and employee experiences, transforming program learnings into a thoughtful, organized, and scalable resource. Its design and layout enhancements—such as hotlinked navigation, callout boxes, and full web addresses—make it user-friendly in both digital and print formats.

The guide successfully integrates themes, innovations, and insights raised through direct engagement with operators, ensuring the content remains grounded in the lived realities of the industry. Its modular structure ensures it can be used flexibly—whether for self-directed learning, as a standalone section, or integrated with the online assessment tool.

Strategic cross-linking to specific documents in the toolkit supports users in moving from “why” to “how” with ease, allowing readers to shift seamlessly from context to action.



### Challenges

A key challenge in developing the Guide was balancing depth with accessibility. Its comprehensive, long-form approach offers valuable context, it can also create a barrier for users who prefer immediate, action-oriented tools. This underscored the need for a two-track strategy: the Guide builds understanding of why culture change matters, while the Toolkit provides the how through practical, ready-to-use templates. Together, they allow operators to move seamlessly between reflection and action. We addressed this by making the direct links to the online toolkit very clear and providing an easy option to skip to customizable templates.

### Mitigation Strategies

To improve usability, significant effort was put into navigation and accessibility. Hotlinks, consistent formatting, and visual cues make it easy to move between concepts and tools. Although the Guide was designed for digital use, including full URLs and printable formatting was intended to reach users who wanted to work from hard copies.

A modular approach was taken in finalizing the content so that each section could be easily lifted and integrated into future platforms, like the online assessment tool. This strategy future-proofs the content and allows for more targeted dissemination of the material based on user needs.

### Lessons Learned

Several lessons emerged through the Guide development process. Most importantly, operators and managers are more likely to engage with workplace culture practices when they first understand why these practices matter. The Guide’s mix of theory, insights, and real-world framing validated this need for context before action.

In addition, we focused on the idea that building trust with the readers matters. Rather than abstract theory, the Guide relies on real stories and familiar situations, creating a tone that builds trust with readers and encourages reflection on their own workplace practices.

Strong wayfinding and embedded tool links helped make the resource approachable, even for readers who do not engage linearly. By pairing conceptual learning with actionable resources, the Guide positions itself as both a reflection of operator and employee experiences and a practical gateway to meaningful culture change across the restaurant industry.

## In the Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift, the sections are

Stage of Development	Content	Governance Committee Review
Workplace Culture & Chefs' Table Society of BC	✓	✓
Project Overview	✓	✓
14 Workplace Culture Shift Ideas	✓	✓
The Transformative power of Fostering Belonging in your Workplace Culture	✓	✓
Proactive Coaching Conversations	✓	✓
The Opportunity of People First Scheduling	✓	✓
Scheduling Strategy 1: Averaging Agreements	✓	✓
Scheduling Strategy 2: People Focused Statutory Holidays	✓	✓
Vacation-Friendly Workplace Culture	✓	✓
Workplace Health as a Leadership Practice	✓	✓
Employee-Reported Challenges in Restaurant Workplace Culture	✓	✓
Finding the Right Candidates for your Workplace Culture	✓	✓
Supporting New and Young Workers	✓	✓
Onboarding: Building Confidence, Culture and Leadership	✓	✓
Resources for Operators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- go2HR / go2HR mental health resources</li> <li>- Mind the Bar</li> <li>- CTS Mentorship Program</li> </ul>	✓	✓

# OPERATOR TOOLKIT - "THE TOOLKIT" OR "TOOLS"

The Operator Toolkit is the practical, action-oriented complement to the Guide to Culture Shift. Developed through insights gathered from operators over the course of the project, the Toolkit translates their needs and challenges into 32 customizable templates designed to formalize policies, set clear standards, and support consistent workplace practices. By reflecting the lived realities of restaurant operators, the Toolkit ensures that every resource is not only relevant but also directly applicable, helping businesses make tangible culture shifts in their day-to-day operations.

**The Toolkit is organized into four colour-coded categories for easy navigation:**

- **Policies & Procedures (Blue)**
- **Recruiting & Hiring (Red)**
- **Performance & Development (Green)**
- **Resilience & Recovery (Orange)**

Each template is provided in Word format with a consistent structure that makes it easy to adapt for individual businesses. Cover pages include a clear title, a short description of the tool's purpose, and guidance on how to personalize and deploy it. Contact information for the Chefs' Table Society is also included so operators can access additional support as needed. After reviewing the instructions, operators can remove the cover page and customize the template for their workplace.

**Every template was designed for maximum usability, with:**

- Minimal formatting to allow easy customization
- Clear naming conventions so the names match the purpose of the document
- Fields for time-stamping and tracking annual reviews/updates
- Colour-coded prompts that guide operators in completing and tailoring the document

Together, the Toolkit provides operators with a straightforward, customizable way to put policies and procedures into practice. It equips them with the clarity and consistency needed to strengthen workplace culture—making change not just a concept but an actionable, sustainable reality.

## **Target Audience – Main Toolkit:**

The Toolkit is designed for established restaurant operators and managers who already have teams in place and are looking to formalize, strengthen, or refine their people practices. These users often come with specific needs—such as improving onboarding, standardizing policies, or addressing performance and retention challenges—and are seeking targeted, practical solutions. Unlike the Guide to Culture Shift, which focuses on narrative learning, context, and reflection, the Toolkit is action-oriented, providing customizable templates and ready-to-use documents that can be applied directly to daily operations. By meeting operators where they are, the Toolkit allows them to formalize policies, set consistent standards, and implement changes incrementally, building on the insights gained from the Guide. In this way, the Toolkit becomes the practical next step for operators ready to move from awareness to tangible culture change, translating culture goals into everyday practices with efficiency and clarity.



## Additional Support for Future Entrepreneurs

As part of our commitment to making the Toolkit more accessible and actionable, we've introduced a pathway specifically designed for future entrepreneurs—those opening a new restaurant or adding a location to an existing group. While current operators benefit from reflecting on existing workplace practices and identifying gaps, prospective owners need forward-looking guidance focused on building a strong foundation from day one. Whether they are hiring their first team, drafting workplace policies, or preparing to open their doors, this pathway organizes the toolkit resources into categories that mirror the start-up journey and focus on the practical needs of operators building from scratch.

This tailored track will prompt new operators to consider people-first strategies during the planning and setup phase—covering areas such as policy development, onboarding design, workplace values, and early-stage recruiting. The goal is to help new restaurateurs proactively embed positive workplace culture into their business model, rather than retrofitting it later. This future-focused component will ensure the tool supports culture-building at every stage of the restaurant life cycle.

This pathway broadens the application and accessibility of the Toolkit. It includes early-stage priorities such as talent acquisition, creating compelling job offers, setting expectations, building team culture, and establishing foundational HR practices. When viewed from the lens of a new operator, the key tools include manager guides, benefits overviews, prospective employee rating tools and onboarding checklists, while still providing access to deeper policies and leadership resources.

A central feature of this pathway is its focus on defining clear workplace values and expectations from the outset. Every step of the “from scratch” culture-building process ties back to the values that guide the business, helping establish norms, align teams, and foster trust. By intentionally shaping culture from day one, new operators can reduce confusion, create a shared sense of purpose, and increase the likelihood of retaining the talent they've worked hard to recruit.



### Target Audience – New Operator Pathway:

The Future Entrepreneurs Pathway is designed for individuals at the earliest stages of restaurant ownership—those who may not yet have staff in place or formal systems established. Unlike established operators, who typically look to the Toolkit for refining existing policies or addressing retention and conflict resolution, this group is focused on building culture and systems from the ground up. Their priorities include setting strong expectations, defining workplace values, and creating clear policies before their first team is even hired. By tailoring the Toolkit to this audience, we ensure that future entrepreneurs can access the same high-quality resources in a way that meets their unique needs—helping them launch with clarity, confidence, and a strong foundation for long-term success.

## Operator Toolkit Learnings

### Successes

The Operator Toolkit has developed into the project's most impactful resource. With over 30 professionally designed documents grouped into four key areas, the toolkit supports restaurants in strengthening workplace culture, improving compliance, and developing a people-first approach to recruitment, orientation, and staff management. By adding the Future Entrepreneur Pathway, we are able to target a broader cross-section of operators to use the toolkit and can easily access and implement the templates to enhance their workplace culture.



The visual presentation of the printed toolkit contributed to a polished and credible one-on-one experience with operators. Operators consistently responded positively to the design and formatting, which were created to be intuitive and accessible—whether printed on a commercial printer or a basic office setup. The colour-coded system and clear groupings helped demystify the people policies and procedures for users who may not have formal training or HR staff.

### Certain tools stood out for their universal relevance and practicality:

- The Orientation Checklist and Acknowledgement Form helped operators align with compliance requirements while reinforcing professional onboarding standards.
- The Health and Safety Policy Statement filled a clear gap for many, providing a strong, ready-to-use document in an area often overlooked by small and medium-sized operators.

- The Setting Expectations for New Workers tool introduced a fresh, practical idea to help manage the often-difficult transition between hiring and job start.
- New and prospective employee rating and assessment tools offered operators a way to shift their hiring lens away from experience alone, toward identifying values alignment and attitude—while supporting structured coaching conversations and reviews post-hire.

Together, these documents build confidence and capacity for operators looking to professionalize their approach to people management without adding overwhelming complexity.

### Challenges

Writing concise, accessible instruction pages for each tool required repeated revisions. Early drafts leaned heavily on context and explanation, but this often led to users skimming or missing key details. Striking the right balance between brevity and clarity—especially for users with English as an additional language—required a rigorous editing and review process.

Ensuring the toolkit was both highly usable and customizable also meant working within the constraints of Microsoft Word. While it remains the most adaptable format for most operators, minor formatting issues arose when tools were opened in different versions of Word or alternative platforms like Google Docs.

In addition, because the Toolkit is designed to be comprehensive and adaptable, some operators may initially feel uncertain about which tools to prioritize or how to integrate them into their current operations. New operators, in particular, may require additional guidance to navigate the full set of resources effectively.



## Mitigation Strategies

To strengthen usability and ensure consistency:

- Each document was edited by governance committee members to ensure accuracy, clarity, and alignment across the toolkit.
- In response to field feedback, we improved headers, refined tool groupings, and enhanced colour-coding to make the system even more user-friendly.
- In one-on-one meetings, we showcased a curated mix of tools tailored to operator needs, which helped spark conversation and uncover specific operational challenges.
- To ensure continued value for early adopters, we emailed new and updated tools directly to participants as they were finalized—reinforcing the toolkit as a living, evolving resource.
- To mitigate formatting issues, we provided guidance in follow-up emails encouraging operators to open files in Microsoft Word and offered alternate formats (PDF) when needed.
- We added the Future Entrepreneurs Pathway to help new operators navigate the tools in a more intuitive way – that reflects building policies and procedures from the ground up, rather than enhancing or adding onto existing documentation.

## Lessons Learned

Operator feedback throughout the project confirmed that practical, actionable resources are critical for translating awareness into meaningful change.

Framing the toolkit within the broader labour research context proved valuable. When operators learned that the project builds on recommendations from the 2018 Metro Vancouver Restaurant Labour Report and the 2022 BC Tourism & Hospitality LMI Project, they were more likely to see the tools as grounded, validated, and worth using. Making that direct connection—customized to each operator’s reality—helped shift the conversation from theory to practical application.

Finally, we learned that the toolkit must remain dynamic. As operators use the tools in real environments, they uncover small improvements or clarifications that enhance usability. By dating all documents in the footer, we now track updates more easily and ensure users always have the most current version.



# AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS: CHECK LISTS, POLICIES & TEMPLATES

The following table tracks the development of documents in the Operator Toolkit. These tools will be accessible as links from the Guide to Culture shift, links on the Chefs’ Table website, through direct request by email to CTS, and through the online assessment process.

**When we developed these education/information resources, our aim is to answer the following questions:**

- Why does this topic/issue/opportunity matter to workplace culture?
- How are we defining the topic/issue/opportunity or any relevant key words?
- Is this a new concept or an old concept that can be addressed in a new way that makes it more people-first?
- If it’s an old concept in transition, what is the shift in thinking that we are advocating for?
- What are steps to take to include this in your workplace culture?
- When possible, what is an example scenario to illustrate the topic/issue/opportunity?

**Download tools by clicking their titles below.**

	Content	Reviewed by Governance Committee	WORD VERSION AVAILABLE	Submitted	In Use
<b>POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</b>					
Manager Guide to Documents (Checklist)	✓	✓	✓	JUNE 2025	✓
Code of Conduct Template	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Occupational Health and Safety Policy Statement Template	Provided by go2HR				
Respectful Workplace Policy	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Template	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Manager Guide to Offboarding	✓	✓	✓	JUNE 2025	✓
Statutory Holiday Swaps	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Averaging Agreement Template	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Scheduling and Sick Leave Policy Statement	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓

	Content	Reviewed by Governance Committee	WORD VERSION AVAILABLE	Submitted	In Use
Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy Template	✓	✓	✓	JUNE 2025	✓
Manager Guide to Bullying & Harassment	✓	✓	✓	JUNE 2025	✓
Social Media Policy Template	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
Speak Up Policy Template	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
Privacy Policy Template	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
Mobile Phone Use Policy Template	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
<b>RECRUITING &amp; HIRING</b>					
Setting Expectations for New Workers	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Interviewing New Candidates for Fit – Sample Questions	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Prospective Employee Rating Tool	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
People First Orientation Checklist Template	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Orientation Checklist (Manager Version)	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
Orientation Checklist (New Worker Version)	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
Orientation Acknowledgement Form	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Orientation Acknowledgement Form (Manager Version)	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Employee Benefits Overview Template	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
New Employee Contract SIMPLE	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓

	Content	Reviewed by Governance Committee	WORD VERSION AVAILABLE	Submitted	In Use
<b>PERFORMANCE &amp; DEVELOPMENT</b>					
New Hire Performance Assessment Tool	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Conducting Coaching Conversations - Checklist	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Coaching Conversations – Sample Questions	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Employee Personal Growth Plans	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Manager/Leader Self-Assessment Checklist	✓	✓	✓	MAY 2025	✓
<b>RESILIENCE &amp; RECOVERY</b>					
Critical Incident Readiness Framework	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Guide to Business Continuity & Emergency Readiness	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
<b>PARTNER RESOURCES</b>					
Menu Costing spreadsheet	Provided by Blue Mountain Solutions				
Market Research spreadsheet	Provided by Blue Mountain Solutions				
Mental Health Tool	Provided by go2HR				
Free Resource: 1 pager	✓	✓	✓	MARCH 2025	✓
Free Resource Info: go2HR	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Free Resource Info: People Working Well	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓
Free Resource Info: Mind the Bar	✓	✓	✓	DEC 2024	✓

# DEVELOPING INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

The success of the Culture Shift Program was made possible through the strength of the partnerships we developed across British Columbia's hospitality and tourism sectors. At the core of our support system were our key collaborators at **go2HR**, whose team of Human Resources Advisors and Psychological Health and Safety Consultants provided essential guidance, tools, education, and direct support to restaurant operators. Their industry-specific expertise helped us address complex workplace issues—from policy development to responding to mental health concerns—with both compassion and compliance. Alongside go2HR, we were grateful to lean on the resources of **Mind the Bar**, a grassroots mental health initiative offering free, employee-focused resources. This ensured that our program supported not only business leaders but also the frontline workers whose well-being is at the heart of workplace culture.

To broaden our reach and ensure our message resonated with operators in diverse regions, we collaborated with an extensive network of industry associations, educational institutions, and tourism partners. These included the BC Chefs' Association, Okanagan Chefs Association, North Vancouver Island Culinary Association and Restaurant Association of Whistler, who helped us promote the program and connect directly with industry professionals. We also worked closely with post-secondary institutions such as Vancouver Island University and Camosun College, as well as key regional organizations like the Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce and Sunshine Coast Tourism among many others.

Our partners played a vital role in promotion, outreach, and community connection by sharing the Culture Shift Program through their newsletters, networks, individual outreach and events. These included Scout Magazine, Restaurants Canada, BC's Alliance of Beverage Licensees, British Columbia Restaurant and Foodservices Association, Gordon Food Service, Visit Prince Rupert, Downtown Nanaimo Business Association and Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism. Through them, we were able to reach small- and medium-sized restaurant operators who may not otherwise have access to people-focused workplace development resources.

In addition to outreach, our partners helped us deliver educational sessions at signature industry events at CooksCamp and SPARK Conference, and regional learning forums hosted by Tourism Kelowna and the Williams Lake Chamber of Commerce. These events allowed us to meet operators where they were—on the ground, in community, and in conversation.

The collective efforts of these organizations not only amplified the program's reach but also reinforced a shared commitment to advancing a healthier, more sustainable hospitality industry in British Columbia.



# PARTICIPATION OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS

We successfully engaged a range of subject matter experts in targeted and strategic ways to strengthen specific components of the program. While their involvement was not continuous, each expert played a critical role in ensuring accuracy, relevance, and practical alignment with real-world restaurant operations.

We consulted a Victoria workplace trainer to help refine language and delivery of people focused customer service strategies, ensuring the tone of the resources struck the right balance between accessibility and professionalism. A Vancouver hospitality lawyer contributed to the review of key policies, particularly around respectful workplace, contracting, and expectations around specific items (Social Media, Mobile Phone Use, Privacy Protection, Speaking Up), helping us ensure the content is not only practical but also legally sound.

Our facilities and systems expert provided insight on workflow and operational setup to align our tools with real-life restaurant settings and ensure they could be integrated easily. Additionally, our diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) specialist was brought in to review draft documents and highlight inclusive practices that support equity and representation within small- and medium-sized restaurant teams.

This targeted approach to expert engagement allowed us to deliver high-quality, focused content that addressed critical areas without overextending the scope of the project. By drawing on their knowledge where it mattered most, we were able to enhance the depth and utility of the tools while staying grounded in the realities of small business operations.



# GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION

From the outset, the program was guided by the active involvement of industry allies who served as our governance committee. These individuals acted as the project’s “eyes and ears,” ensuring that every stage of development stayed relevant, targeted, and grounded in the real needs of restaurant operators. Their feedback and perspective provided a direct link between the program team and the realities of the industry, helping us validate priorities, test ideas, and refine tools so they would resonate with operators. By engaging these trusted leaders as partners, we built credibility, strengthened alignment with industry challenges, and ensured that the program outcomes reflected both expert insight and lived experience.

The governance committee has played an integral role in shaping the tone, structure and clarity of our work at every stage of development, delivery, and refinement. From concept to execution, committee members brought deep expertise, real-world insights, and ongoing engagement that helped shape the program’s structure, content, and long-term vision. Their contributions have ensured the project remains practical, relevant, and rooted in industry needs. Importantly, the committee represented a diversity of perspectives across ownership, management, HR, operations, and mental health—allowing us to pressure-test ideas from multiple angles and keep the resources usable across a wide spectrum of restaurant environments.

The committee’s consistent involvement ensured that the program not only reflected industry realities but also earned trust from operators, increasing adoption and long-term impact. Through regular meetings, their ideas and suggestions elevated the overall quality and professionalism of the final product and helped align the content with the project’s goals and voice. Their commitment also laid a foundation for future iterations of the program, ensuring that the tools remain relevant and adaptable as industry needs evolve.

The committee was actively engaged in the development, review, and evaluation of the project—connecting with us by phone, on Zoom, and in person throughout the project. Nine formal meetings were held over the duration of the project (2023: August & September, 2024: March, September, November & December, 2025: February, March & May). Additional one-on-ones with individual members provided targeted input in specific areas where their expertise and insight was most valuable.



**ROBERT BELCHAM**  
Hospitality Consulting



**EVA GATES**  
Human Resources  
Consultant



**MARGOT BALORO**  
Wildlight Kitchen + Bar



**STEVEN LEWIS**  
The Keg  
Steakhouse + Bar



**JOHNNY BRIDGE**  
Chefs' Table  
Society/Mind the Bar



**CINDY CONTI**  
go2HR



**MELODY MCLORIE**  
The Wickaninnish Inn



**PEPE BARAJAS**  
Infinity Group

### **Governance committee members graciously:**

- Connected us with their colleagues to secure program participants
- Provided document review and editing throughout the process
- Introduced new resource concepts and template ideas
- Tested the tools and templates on a range of computers and operating systems
- Developed clearer wayfinding, colour coding, and navigation for program tools
- Suggested changes to our Rating Prospective Employees tool and how it can be used in combination with the New Hire Performance Assessment to aid in building a strong platform for coaching conversations with new staff and supporting professional development
- Had their businesses participate in the online assessment and one-on-one in-person assessments
- Helped us develop and test the Zoom version of the one-on-one meeting

In May 2025, governance committee members also participated in a focused consultation with Qatalyst Research Group, reflecting on the project's process and impact, and providing valuable insight into the future use and legacy of the tools developed.

Committee members have remained actively involved in reviewing working documents as they evolved, offering expert feedback and applied knowledge between meetings. Several also contributed directly as proofreaders and editors, strengthening the coherence and accuracy of the final product in their areas of expertise—including human resources, operations, recruiting, performance management, and mental health.

### **As proofreaders and editors, the committee members contributed expertise as follows:**

- **Human Resources** – Eva Gates, Melody McLorie, Cindy Conti, Margot Baloro
- **Operations** – Robert Belcham, Pepe Barajas, Margot Baloro
- **Recruiting** – Pepe Barajas
- **Performance Management and Employee Feedback** – Steve Lewis
- **Mental Health** – Johnny Bridge, Cindy Conti

Their lived experience helped us shape the narrative for the intended audience and ensured the final resources spoke in a voice that operators could relate to and trust.

Special thanks to Cindy Conti, our liaison to go2HR, who has been instrumental in connecting the project with regional HR advisors and ensuring follow-up with participating restaurants. The go2HR team overall has provided exceptional support. During our two spring outreach trips, we worked closely with **Ginger Brunner** (Okanagan/Interior) and **Christie Blaquiere** (Williams Lake), while **Erin O'Byrne** supported mental health resource development and review.

The governance committee's ongoing guidance has ensured the program remained practical, credible, and aligned with the real needs of restaurant operators. We thank them for the depth and thoughtfulness of their contributions as they guided us in positioning this project for lasting industry impact.

# LEGACY RESOURCE: SUSTAINABLE ONLINE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The **Sustainable Online Assessment Tool** is a self-guided digital platform designed through our partnership with Qatalyst Research Group that will automate and scale the personalized support that restaurant operators received during one-on-one engagements. Built from real-world insights and operator feedback, this tool will help restaurateurs identify their workplace culture gaps and immediately give them direction to resources tailored to address their specific needs.

At its core, the tool asks operators a set of practical, diagnostic questions that map directly to our library of over 30 customizable tools and templates. Based on the responses, the platform uses artificial intelligence (AI) to direct users to the policies, checklists, or best-practice guidance in the toolkit that are aligned with their specific needs. This individual dashboard is now called the “Personalized Roadmap”, and it provides immediate, action-oriented support with narrative copy that recaps what the business has said, identifies potential issues and offers strategies to consider by themed section.

While the onboarding tool developed early in the program by Qatalyst didn’t play as large a role in recruitment as anticipated, it became foundational in identifying the most common operational and HR gaps—directly shaping the toolkit’s content.

The evolution of the platform is AI integration of a “Question and Answer” section which allows users to ask open-ended questions and be guided toward the most appropriate tools or resources based on their unique challenges. This conversational feature adds a new layer of accessibility, particularly for users who may not know exactly what they’re looking for, but are trying to solve a specific workplace issue. As this feature is used by operators, it will allow us to publish a set of common questions that can be clicked on. The AI will source the answers from our tools/templates as well as the more narrative style content developed for the Guide to Culture Shift.

As we move beyond the direct facilitation phase of the project, the Online Assessment Tool becomes a central pillar of the Culture Shift program’s long-term impact. Its scalable, low-barrier design ensures that restaurants across B.C.—regardless of size or capacity—can continue accessing meaningful supports well into the future. Recent enhancements, such as previews of all downloadable documents, make the tool more user-friendly and reduce hesitation around downloading unknown files.

**Access the Sustainable Online Assessment Tool directly:**

Scan the QR code or visit [chefs-table-evaluation.web.app](https://chefs-table-evaluation.web.app)



## Supporting Longevity: Website Integration & Ongoing Engagement

To support sustainability, a link tool will be integrated into a centralized hub on the Chefs' Table Society website. This hub will organize resources into three key areas:

1. **Guide to Culture Shift** – Narrative-based learning, context, and links to deeper resources.
2. **Online Assessment Tool** – A self-guided or facilitator-supported entry point.
3. **Online Toolkit** – Downloadable Word and PDF documents to support implementation.

Additional features will improve navigation and accessibility, including a searchable tool finder and download tracking to monitor usage.

CTS and SCOUT Magazine newsletters will promote the platform – and we will share the link to all our partners across restaurant networks, industry associations, and regional tourism groups. Ongoing support will include quarterly engagement checks, annual content reviews, and feedback tools to ensure the platform remains relevant, useful, and updated with current AI capabilities.

This approach ensures that the tools developed through this Restaurant Culture Shift program remains a living, responsive resource that supports people-first practices in B.C.'s restaurant industry for years to come.



## Integration into CTS' Culinary Commons

The launch of the **Chefs' Table Society's new Culinary Commons** will further strengthen the reach and impact of the program's legacy tools. As a physical hub for knowledge-sharing, programming, and collaboration within B.C.'s culinary community, the Commons will serve as an in-person access point for restaurant operators seeking guidance on workplace culture. With a part-time staff member dedicated to community engagement and resource support, the Centre will help promote the use of the toolkit, the Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift and online assessment tool, assist operators with navigating resources, and foster a deeper connection between digital tools and real-world practice. This hybrid model—combining online accessibility with in-person support—ensures that the Culture Shift legacy is both scalable and grounded in meaningful community relationships.



## Visibility & Awareness

### 1. Partner Amplification:

We will collaborate with regional tourism, hospitality, and HR associations (e.g., go2HR, BC Restaurant & Foodservices Association) to link directly to the tool on their websites and newsletters.

### 2. QR Codes:

Provide QR code linking to the tool for easy access by partners sharing the program.

### 3. Digital Word-of-Mouth Strategy:

Encourage past program participants and governance committee members to share testimonials (short video or written) on social media and newsletters, highlighting how the tool helped them.

### 4. Webinars + Info Sessions:

Host a webinar in the fall of 2025 and fall of 2026 to walk through the tool and highlight real-life use cases.

### 5. CooksCamp 2025:

As CTS' flagship industry facing event, CooksCamp is a platform for sharing positive industry stories. The final toolkit and Guide to Culture Shift was shared with delegates at CooksCamp this fall.

## Long-Term Engagement

### 1. Feedback Loop:

For users providing email addresses, a simple 3-question prompt after using the tool will ask:

- Was this helpful?
- What did you need but didn't find?
- What's one area of workplace culture you're still struggling with?

Use this feedback to evolve the tool and content over time.

### 2. Progress Save + Email Resume Link:

We will allow users to save their progress and receive a link to resume later via email, making it easier for busy owners to return to the tool when they have time.

Here are screen captures of the Resource listing within the online tool.

**Chefs' Table**

- Dashboard
- Questionnaire
- Your Responses
- Personalized Roadmap
- Resources
- Manage Surveys
- Manage Users
- Account Settings
- Logout

## Resources

RESOURCES

### Policies and Procedures

These templates simplify the implementation of industry best practices and compliance. Formalizing **Policies and Procedures** sets clear expectations for staff, reduces confusion and lay the groundwork for developing team members one-on-one with the ultimate goal of fostering a professional, high-performing workplace experience.

**Available for Download:**

- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Health & Safety Policy Statement](#)
- [Respectful Workplace Policy](#)
- [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Policy](#)
- [Orientation Checklist](#)
- [Orientation Acknowledgement Form](#)
- [Statutory Holiday Swaps](#)
- [Averaging Agreement Template](#)
- [Scheduling & Sick Leave Policy Template](#)
- Anti-Bullying & Harassment Template (Pending)

### Recruiting & Hiring

Standardizing your **Recruiting & Hiring** process ensures your company values at the forefront when targeting and selecting candidates. A consistent, fair, and structured approach not only attracts the right talent but also strengthens your restaurant's culture by ensuring new hires align with your team. When customizing these templates, keep your brand and values in mind to set a clear and consistent foundation for long-term success.

**Available for Download:**

- [Setting Expectations for New Workers](#)
- [Interviewing Candidates for Fit](#)
- [Prospective Employees Rating Tool](#)

**Sections**

- Policies and Procedures
- Recruiting & Hiring
- Resilience & Recovery
- Performance & Development

**Chefs' Table**

- Dashboard
- Questionnaire
- Your Responses
- Personalized Roadmap
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- Manage Surveys
- Manage Users
- Account Settings
- Logout

## Resources

RESOURCES

### Resilience & Recovery

In today's unpredictable world, previously unthinkable situations, emergencies and disruptions are inevitable – it's not a matter of if they will happen, but when. Our **Resilience & Recovery** tools are designed to help develop a proactive strategy that allows you to navigate crises more effectively and build long-term resilience for future challenges.

**Available for Download:**

- [Critical Incident Readiness Framework](#)
- [Guide to Business Continuity & Emergency Readiness](#)

### Performance & Development

Our **Performance & Development** tools provide a structured framework to ensure consistency in how employees – especially your future leaders – are supported, evaluated and developed. By setting clear expectations and providing meaningful growth opportunities, these tools help cultivate a motivated, high-performing team. A structured approach fosters engagement, creates growth opportunities and strengthens your workplace culture and improves retention, driving long-term restaurant success.

**Available for Download:**

- [Probationary Employee Rating Tool](#)
- [Conducting Effective Coaching Checklist](#)
- [Coaching Conversations – Sample Questions](#)
- [Employee Personal Growth Plans](#)
- [Manager/Leader Self-Assessment](#)

**Sections**

- Policies and Procedures
- Recruiting & Hiring
- Resilience & Recovery
- Performance & Development

# FUTURE-RELEVANCE

The Online Assessment Tool and Guide to Restaurant Culture Shift are not just static references—they have been intentionally designed as a living resource that are able to evolve over time.

The segmentation of tools and different sections of the Guide encourage ongoing use, reflection, and adaptation. A section could easily be removed or updated in the future: ensuring that the overall tool is still relevant well beyond the pilot period.

Because the Online Assessment and The Guide link directly to customizable templates and tools, operators have a access to growing library of resources and can return to it repeatedly as their needs, team dynamics, or business priorities shift over time.

Importantly, the guide is deeply grounded in real-world insights and frontline operator experiences, which ensures it remains relatable and credible. It addresses not only best practices but also practical realities, giving operators context and strategies that reflect the current labour market, shifting employee expectations, and regional business conditions. The ideas presented in this guide are timely, but they're not limited to this moment. The examples chosen speak to enduring challenges and opportunities that extend beyond the immediate context.

The Online Assessment Tool allows operators to take on people culture in a self-guided way. We anticipate this will resonate, but it will be promoted as part of a broader ecosystem of support that CTS is working on through the Culinary Centre and CooksCamp.

**By emphasizing principles over prescriptions, the legacy of this project is to equip operators with the mindset, not just the materials, for long-term culture change.** It's built to spark ongoing improvement, giving operators the “why” behind the “how” so they can lead with purpose and make culture a core part of their business identity for years to come.

