

Land Food and Community 350

**The Vancouver Food Strategy
Assessing Language Barriers to Community Garden Participation
Final Report**

Group 16

Executive Summary:

Community garden (CG) participation is greatly encouraged for its potential to address community food insecurity. As a multicultural city, the language barriers in Vancouver may jeopardize the participation of multilingual residents in CGs. Our CBEL project aims to study the accessibility of CGs to multilingual residents by examining CG demographics and the languages of their written resources.

74 Vancouver CGs were contacted with a short questionnaire via e-mail and phone regarding application process and availability of multilingual garden resources. A low initial response rate shifted our study towards a grounded theory approach, which included interviewing several gardeners and stakeholders to execute case studies. Personal and identifying information of responders were undisclosed for ethical purposes.

Initially, we received 16 out of 74 responses, three of which were automatic replies regarding full waitlists. Four gardens had English-only application materials, and the remaining gardens processed with informal application, such as personal conversation with the prospective gardener or an e-mail request for a plot. We discovered Mandarin instructions for creating CGs on the City of Vancouver (CV) website, which implies a recognition multilingual needs. From interviews with two coordinators of the same garden, we received mixed perceptions of the importance of multilingualism within CGs. An interview with an ESL gardener revealed language barriers and difficulty completing applications and other CGs interviewed showed appreciation of the concept of multilingual resources, but no plans to implement such resources.

Accessibility is restricted for non-English speakers due to the lack of multilingual resources, informal application processes, and long waitlists. Off-season and out-dated information on CV site may have impacted our response rates and results. Vancouver Food Strategy (VFS) strives to empower isolated groups to participate in CGs, as these residents tend to be more susceptible to food insecurity. Many immigrants or Aboriginal residents who have

gardening expertise can stimulate cross-cultural interactions by CG participation, leading to improved social capital. Therefore, cultural diversity within CGs is a critical asset in Vancouver. We suggest updating the CG contact information and increasing funding to prioritize CG multilingualism. CG coordinators should adopt standardized application processes with printed and or electronic resources. A CG Action Plan much like VFS on urban farming could be implemented to articulate commitments, priorities, and solutions.

Introduction

This semester our group embarked on a project to assess the language barriers that non-English speaking residents of Vancouver may face when trying to participate in a community garden. This project was designed to reflect the Vancouver Food Strategy's values and objectives of equal access and inclusion (City of Vancouver, 2013). This document, which was created as part of Vancouver's Greenest City 2020 Action Plan, reflects a city that is sustainability minded, and intentionally trying to create food systems that are accessible and sustainable for all. This is demonstrated by the Vancouver Food Strategy's goals to increase the number of CGs from 3640 to 5000 by 2020, to increase the number of urban farms from 17-35 by 2020, and to increase the number of farmers markets from 9 to 22 by 2020. These goals of the food strategy are underpinned by a belief that "food is a basic human right. All residents need accessible, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food" (City of Vancouver, 2013). This project is situated within the simplified food system we've outlined in Figure 1.

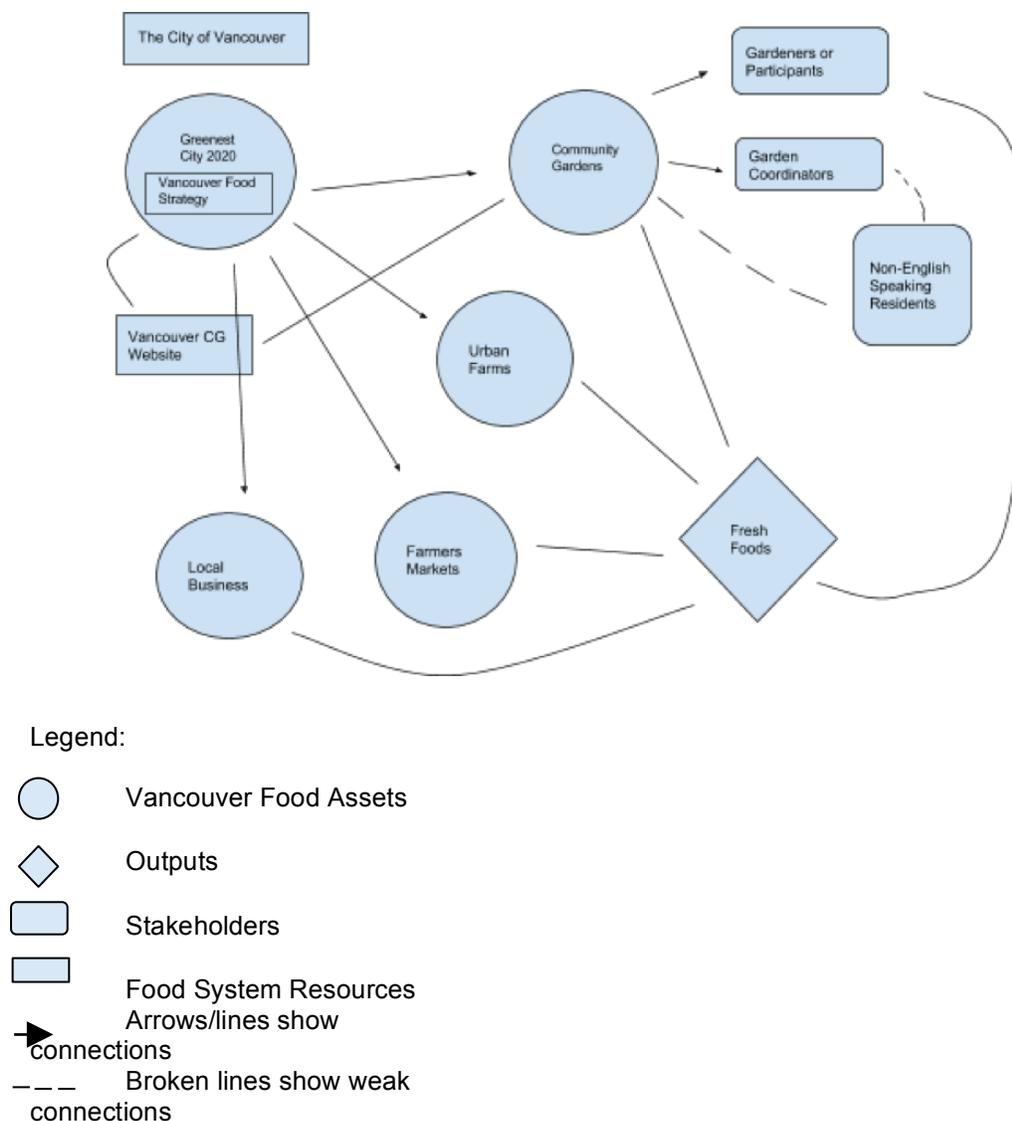


Figure 1: System Diagram of Vancouver Food Strategy and Community Gardens

The vision of the Vancouver Food Strategy was created in the context of our highly multicultural city. Vancouver is a major immigration hub of Canada (The Canadian Consumer, 2010). Interestingly, 80% of immigrants to Canada from 2001-2006 speak neither English nor French (The Canadian Consumer, 2010). Without fluency in the dominant English tongue, many non-English speaking residents may be restrained from accessing and participating in Vancouver's food assets, such as CGs.

Community gardening has been shown to create many benefits for the residents and neighborhoods. It has constantly been shown as a way to improve community food security by increasing resident's access to local and culturally appropriate foods (Draper and Freedman, 2010). Notably, community gardening is also a powerful way to create social capital, (networks and relationships that help a community to function). According to research from Alaimo et al. (2010), CG participation is “associated with more positive perceptions of bonding social capital, linking social capital, and the existence of positive neighborhood norms and values”. Building such social capital is also one of the foundational commitments articulated by the Vancouver Food Strategy (City of Vancouver, 2013). CGs are considered beneficial to multicultural residents of a city, as there will be places to grow affordable, culturally appropriate food (Wakefield et al., 2007) as well as hosting social events to promote cultural harmony (Draper and Freedman, 2010). CGs consistently show benefits to the neighborhoods they are situated in by improving food security, building social capital, and creating spaces for cultural expression.

Significance:

Although these benefits clearly fall in line with the ideals of the Vancouver Food Strategy, language barriers may be preventing non-English speaking residents from participating and accessing them. Our project fits into this space; our objective was to assess what barriers non-English speaking residents may face when trying to participate in CGs. Similarly, Seto (2009) has examined factors that affect CG participation in Vancouver, such as culture and ethnicity. His research highlights a tendency for CGs to exclude residents with different cultural, economic or social backgrounds. Our study examines whether it is language barriers that inhibit CG participation of multilingual residents, further extending Seto's observations.

Project objective

Our objective for our CBEL project was to evaluate language barriers to access and participation of CGs faced by non-English speaking residents. By conducting qualitative research using case studies and interviews, we aimed to discover the availability of multilingual

applications and materials offered by CGs. This research will hopefully unveil the necessary steps and processes needed to improve CG accessibility and thus enhance community food security.

Inquiry questions

- What languages are applications for CGs available in?
- To what extent have language barriers faced by multilingual groups been recognized among community gardens?

Limitations

Time constraint was the greatest challenge of our CBEL project, as well as the outdated information on the City of Vancouver website. Lacking time for follow-up emails and in-person visits, our data was not inclusive and representative to make conclusions and generalizations to all CGs in Vancouver. Aside from the time constraint, the amount CG participants were lower due to the off-season visits; as a result, fewer gardeners were presented in our research.

Methods

The project was initially designed to be quantitative research. CG coordinators listed on the CV website were contacted by email or phone and asked about garden resources, availability of multilingual application forms and the demographics of multilingual gardeners. The response rate was significantly lower than expected and some of the replies were automated messages indicating full waitlists. Consequently, we shifted our research method to a qualitative study, using the grounded theory approach, which “consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (Charmaz 2014). CG coordinators who responded were contacted inquiring for further interviews as case studies (questions attached in appendix A). In-person interviews were conducted on coordinators from one CG, one urban farm, one NGO, and two multilingual gardeners. Interviews were documented by voice recording and notes, with the exception of a CG coordinator who was

interviewed through emails. The recorded interviews and personal conversations were later transcribed with common themes and differences analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

The project does not disclose any personal or identifying information of any organization, coordinator or gardener. The name of interviewees are indicated by letters A, B, C, D, and E. Before each interview, consent forms were signed by interviewees, and we offered to send a copy of the final report to ensure comments were not taken out of context.

Results

During the first phase of our project, we experienced difficulties communicating with CG coordinators; of the 74 emails we send, we received only 16 responses and 3 of those were automated replies. None of the 3 phone calls were answered, indicating a 21% response rate. The responses we did get indicated they did not have any applications in languages other than English, or that they didn't have applications and members joined informally, such as by talking to the coordinator. Due to the low responses, we moved to qualitative research by conducting interviews to get further information regarding CG coordinators and gardeners experience.

During qualitative research, we discovered the majority of CGs do not have applications or resources in languages other than English. Gardens also tended to have long waitlists. Garden A has a 5-year wait list and has stopped accepting applications until spots open up. The president pointed out that they also accept application from people who've had informal conversations with coordinators when walking by (Personal Communication, Nov 19, 2015). CV is the one stakeholder that has multilingual resources as the CG website has forms to start a CG in both English and Mandarin.

We also assessed to what extent language barriers have been recognized among CGs. A recurring theme across both the email responses and the qualitative interviews is that although it is acknowledged to be a valuable idea, it is rarely translated into action. None of the CG's had applications in languages other than English, and none mentioned plans to translate their materials. One CG contacted via email told us about a welcome sign at their garden that was written in 5 different languages, which shows an awareness of the importance of multilingualism (personal communication, October 29, 2015). Unfortunately, we doubt that this makes a significant difference to the accessibility of this garden to non-English speaking residents. During communication with CG A, one of the board members expressed great interest and excitement for the idea of translating resources and encouraging multilingualism (personal communication, November 19, 2015). She relayed her experience with a gardener that was a huge asset to the garden, but tended to be isolated due to poor English skills. Interestingly, within the same board, a member expressed that translating materials would be too taxing on the already overwhelmed board and that it was not a necessary task as people could communicate sufficiently in English (personal communication, November 19, 2015). Finally, when we spoke with a gardener at CG B, she explained that when she signed the gardening contract, she couldn't easily read it, and chose to just sign it without looking through it (personal communication, November, 2015). In this instance, the CG may not even be aware that some of the participants have difficulties with English.

Discussion

Our research objective was to evaluate the accessibility of CGs in Vancouver for language minorities who speak little or no English. Our findings suggested an a lack of sufficient

multilingual resources for ESL or non-English speaking gardeners, in addition to conflict of interests of CG coordinators on their perceived importance of linguistic diversity within CGs, and the necessity of providing multilingual resources.

Across all CGs contacted, accessibility was limited for multilingual gardeners. CGs with written applications or documented contracts and handbooks only offered such resources in English. As learned in an interview with Gardner B, ESL gardeners may have difficulty understanding contracts and applications, therefore signing documents without much comprehension of rules or conditions (personal communication, November 8, 2015). CGs that fostered informal means of application such as email applications or walk-ins may also pose a complication, as ESL or non-English speaking people may find it challenging to generate a complete e-mail or feel uncomfortable speaking with a coordinator in English.

Some CG coordinators acknowledged cultural diversity and multilingualism within their CGs. The president of CG A (Coordinator A) brought our attention to the cultural diversity of gardeners, who would often speak in their native languages and practiced growing culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables in their plots (personal communication, November 8, 2015). However, all communication with the board of directors within CG A, both written and spoken, were only in English. Coordinator A also spoke of an ESL Gardener who was oftentimes excluded from interactions and communication with other gardeners, due to a language barrier caused by the gardener's thick accent (personal communication, November 19, 2015). While Coordinator A recognized and tried to amend social issues posed by language barriers within the CG, Coordinator B declared no desire to implement translation services or multilingual resources, as the majority of the gardeners from CG A spoke sufficient English (personal communication, November 19, 2015). We can infer from this statement that CG A may lack

linguistically diverse participants as English-only resources may present an initial “filtering effect”. However, there may be efforts by other CG Coordinators to overcome language barriers and create a more welcoming environment for culture minorities, although the issue is not addressed seriously. For instance, in CG G, a homemade sign reading “Welcome, Food is For Everyone” was written in five different languages, but this CG only had english applications.

Due to time constraint, we were limited to interviews from two multilingual gardeners, therefore those who face substantial language difficulties within CGs were underrepresented. We must also consider that not all residents may want to participate in CGs, therefor CG language barriers may not be an universal issue. The small sample size of our qualitative study can provide some evidence on the current community food security issues but cannot be generalized to a greater extent.

Vancouver Food Strategy works to empower residents to take action in improving access to community-based programs. Therefore it is a priority to eradicate language barriers within CGs to enhance for cultural minorities (City of Vancouver, 2013). Increasing CG participation is important as it not only builds social networks and connections, but also provides a source of affordable and nutritious fresh produce for vulnerable groups who may be more susceptible to food insecurity (Dietitians of Canada & Slater, 2007; Thompson, Corkery & Judd 2007). Finally, as indicated by the Asset-Based Community Development strategy, the existing uniqueness and skills are what strengthen a community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Therefore, cultural diversity within communities is definately a critical asset.

Conclusion

As revealed in our findings, there is a lack of multilingual resources within Vancouver CGs, and an overall lack of accessibility due to inefficient communication. While most of the

current research focuses on the limiting factors of CGs accessibility caused by many issues, there are no studies on language barriers specifically. Our project touched on a niche point of research, filling an important gap in the existing knowledge in the field of language and accessibility. Through this, we hope to improve awareness on the issue with the people we contacted and see changes in the future within those communities.

Many unanswered questions still remain: it is crucial to ask how the demographic of the area relates to language barrier, as CG A Coordinator 1 explained, they would not know what language to translate written materials to first, as their neighbourhood is very multicultural (Personal communication, November 19, 2015). If linguistic and cultural demography were integrated into the research, more insightful and systematic perspectives can be generated. In order to suggest more practical and effective solutions, other factors that may impede CG accessibility, such as cultural and educational aspects, and distance must be considered on top of language barriers.

First, we suggest updating information on the City of Vancouver website regarding CGs as the primary step into making CGs more accessible to the public. CGs should translate advertisements, applications and other gardening resources such as handbooks through partnerships with an educational institution. Additionally, a resource group could be created for CG coordinators as they have similar challenges and collectively prioritize actions and address relevant issues. Funding from the city needs to become more available to CGs, to allow development project opportunities. Finally, an action plan similar to the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan (2015) should be employed to bring focus to CGs and work on setting commitments that continue to promote and improve food security for all residents.

Critical Reflections

“V”

Although this CBEL project had challenges throughout the semester, I really appreciated the opportunity to create our own project and see it through from start to finish. By being responsible for the design of the project I felt more ownership over the work we did and the impact it had on the community. It was important to me that the benefits of our work were clear to either the city or other stakeholders that could use our findings. One of the difficulties of creating our own project was not being able to communicate or brainstorm with a community partner. When our project switched focus from qualitative to quantitative, it was tough to know if the people we were speaking to or questions we were asking were relevant to the experiences of stakeholders. I think if we had been able to brainstorm with an experienced partner we may have been able to better research that would be more relevant to local community gardens and planners. Overall I enjoyed the challenge of creating our own project, although much of our time in flexible learning sessions was spent discussing ‘what to do next’ so more of the legwork of the project had to be done individually and on top of class time.

“M”

As with any group project, I always find the most challenging part to be scheduling meeting times, and having the presence of all group members at meetings. In order to combat the issue of conflicting schedules, my group turned to online documents and social platforms to manage most of our communication and group work assignments. I soon became very proficient at responding quickly to messages and e-mails, as well as following the progress of our project through using Google Docs to write reports and timelines. LFS 350 has also allowed us to be more flexible in our meeting times and assignment deadlines by providing us with Flexible Learning periods, and an abundance of online-based assignments such as writing a blog. Although simple, the blog post assignments allowed my group to make weekly timelines which included upcoming deadlines and objectives , as well as celebrating weekly successes, both of which were extremely beneficial

for the organization of our group project. Moving forward, I can apply these organizational skills that I've learned and continue to use online platforms to assist in any group work projects.

“A”

Working on this CBEL project was a very enriching experience as I had never done anything of the sort before; in other classes group work is limited to researching and presenting, but not really to actually working out in the field. It was very valuable to have flexible learning sessions, as it allowed us to experience what project development outside of academics looks like. I'm not used to having this kind of freedom in a school context and it was a bit hard to get used to the format, but in the end worked well for my learning. This was made more challenging by the fact that we didn't have a specific community partner or project given to us; I enjoyed having the option to really go out there and do our own project but it was definitely more challenging than I thought it would be. Other aspects of our learning, such as the blog posts and academic papers were a good complement to what we were doing and helped me look beyond just our project; the blog posts were helpful to keep us on track and help us realize our achievements, while the papers made me realize what exists out there and the network of people and organizations we are part of. However, I do think they hindered my progress on the CBEL somewhat, as I would focus on the other aspects rather than advancing on the CBEL itself.

“K”

LFS 250 gave me the theoretical concept of the sustainable food system. As continuation, LFS 350 heavily focuses on applying the concepts into practice. All assignments were related to the project. To investigate one perspective of the food strategy, this project can be defined as both opportunity and challenge. The food strategy contains a variety of aspects which could be identified. We had the opportunity to choose the most interested issue. While it was difficult to find proper one to fit in a short period (only four months). Our group was a multicultural team with members from different countries. And this was one reason why we inquiring the accessibility of community garden regarding different languages. Facts proved that this project

was not going well-off. Many unexpected factors forced us to re-orient our plan and method. The flexible learning session provided us time to sit down and discuss strategy to overcome the difficulties. In learning perspective, I prefer the way that academic and experiential review paper was separated into three parts. It helped me to work effectively. As for me, I got the most helpful research skills from the course on research ethics (CORE) tutorial. The guidance can be used in future research methodology.

“L”

One thing I have learned from my CBEL experience is to accept and appreciate the uncertainty in research projects. Conducting a research project is not always smooth sailing, especially when we are dealing with a problem in the local food system and there are many factors at play. Will and Josh helped us a lot when we were stuck in our research and gave us many suggestions in terms of research methods and our project in general. I remember in one of the lectures, TAs talked about the uncertainties they had encountered in their research projects, which makes me realize that uncertainties are common in all research processes and sometimes I just need to look at them from a different angle. The flexible learning sessions were very helpful as well.

Everyone had different schedules so it was hard to find time to meet up and the flexible learning sessions gave us the time to talk about our project. This constant communication makes sure everyone is on the same page and everyone knows what our next step is. I also enjoyed working with community garden coordinators and I genuinely appreciate them for taking their time to meet with us and being honest about the reality of language barriers in their community gardens.

“C”

The fieldwork we conducted in our community-based project was both thought-provoking and insightful. Though being prepared by reading required class material and going to lectures, the interview with one of the community partners was the highlight of my journey of CBEL project. As the size of foreign population sprouted during the past decades and I expected to see a lot of awareness towards the issues that non-English speakers may face in the city of Vancouver. To my great surprise, very few people are concerned about the issue that non-English speakers are

confronting or even realize that some individuals may have serious trouble fitting into their community because of their language barrier. However, in papers that I've read, multiculturalism and its relative topics are right under the current academic spotlight. Such a huge difference between research papers and the result of actual interviews with people taught me that words from books are not strong enough when dealing with issues. Rather, we should conduct more fieldwork based on our knowledge from books and papers. Therefore, in order to get enriched and efficient learning experiences, I will try to incorporate hands-on experiences in my future study and career.

“Y”

Unlike many other groups who had specific project guideline, we were able to create our own project within the context of Vancouver's Food Strategy. Making the CBEL project from scratch was more challenging than I expected. As a group, although we came with a diverse field of study, we all share great enthusiasm in the community food security issues. The synergy in our group would definitely be one of the successful factors of our project. LFS 350 took a dynamic teaching approach by giving us certain degree of independence to explore community food security issues. However, freedom turns out to be the most significant challenge I experienced in this course. Without any specific instructions, we struggled to define our CBEL project clearly in the beginning of the course. The flexible learning, however, released us from the classroom and forced us to explore the real world. As a matter of fact, it was quite helpful in terms of our scope change, for we were able to see the problems ourselves instead of passively perceive the information. Eventually, we managed to establish an achievable project that targeted a specific problem-- community garden accessibility instead of the entire food system. Personally, my past learning experience was mainly associated with processed information. Given the opportunity to collect first-hand data, I observed how information could potentially be misinterpreted and biased. Therefore, I would like to apply the valuable skills and experience on my future study.

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Appendix A

Community Garden Coordinator

1. How do you advertise to your community in general? How do people find out about you?
2. How can people reach you (email? in person? phone?)?
3. How do you communicate with garden members?
4. What gardening resources do you have? Are they in other languages?
5. Did you ever encounter a situation in which language was a barrier to communication with gardeners or possible gardeners?
6. Are there any multilingual members? What percentage? What demographic (?)
7. Where are most of your gardeners coming from in Vancouver?

Gardener: Laurie Lu, at Crows Point

1. What is your mother tongue? Do you speak other languages? *I speak Mandarin and Japanese and English.*
2. How did you hear about the garden? *It is very close to my house and I see it all the time when I come home from work.*
3. Did you have any difficulties accessing the information? *Language-related or otherwise? The garden has a blog but I never check it. The application is in English but only need me to sign it.*
4. Do you know someone who wants to participate but cannot? *My other friend want to apply but they are full for this year.*
5. Why do you want to be part of this community garden? *Do you feel a sense of community? I like to garden my own vegetables because I know it is fresh. Sometimes I bring my daughter but I mostly go alone.*
6. How did you learn how to garden? *We grew vegetables when I lived in Beijing and now I do not have a space for a garden at home so I use this area.*
7. What kind of things do you grow? Are they part of your culture? *I grow mostly simple things that can grow in this weather. Kale, lettuce, cucumber, beans. I use all in my cooking. I use beans to make Chinese stir-fry.*

Gardener: Anonymous at Hasting Urban Farms

1. What is your mother tongue? Do you speak other languages? *I speak French and English.*
2. How did you hear about the garden? *It is a garden on Hastings street, very noticeable.*
3. Did you have any difficulties accessing the information? *No, I can speak English and they do not have any written materials.*
4. Do you know someone who wants to participate but cannot? *I have never met any.*
5. Why do you want to be part of this garden? *Do you feel a sense of community? I definitely feel a sense of community here. People who volunteer or work here are so friendly. I would like to help the farm, that is why I am here*
6. How did you learn how to garden? *The manager taught me a lot. I am learning how to garden everyday.*

7. What kind of things do you grow? Are they part of your culture? *Since it is a farm rather than a garden, I just help them to grow whatever they have planed.*

Interview: Laurie Lu, Gardener at Crows Point Community Garden (East Vancouver)

Questions	Responses
Languages spoken	Mandarin (first and primary language), Japanese (second language), English (third language)

Interview: Gardener at Hastings Urban Farm (DTES)

Questions	Responses
Languages spoken	French (first and primary language), English (second language)

Richmond Food Security Society

1. What programs do you have in place to attract and support non-English speaking communities? *We have a program called Stir it Up Kids that involved multicultural youth, as well as research going on with the previous Director, who's looking at language and community gardens, although the research isn't the same a programing.*
2. How do people hear about the organization or community garden? *Through word of mouth, or we have social media, twitter, as well as our website.*
3. Do you know if there are any gardeners who struggle with communication and inclusion? *Not that I'm aware of, we definitely have multilingual gardeners, but we've had little issues with miscommunication.*