

CITY MARKET CASE STUDIES: *Embracing Food Life*

To inform the development of the Master Plan, MRA International, a development consultancy focused on the conception, strategy, and execution of destinations, surveyed 24 best-in-class city markets.

While Pike Place Market is unique, four historic public markets emerged as having undergone strategic planning processes that are highly relevant to the Pike Place Market Master Plan. All four are similarly addressing the challenges of creating a distinctive Food Life program, reattracting locals, and embracing diversity among producers, merchants and patrons. Common themes include:

- Food Life as defining goal: In all four case studies, Food Life is embraced to enhance each market’s distinctiveness as a medium of its region’s culinary culture and food sources with a mix of pan-cultural offerings.
- A focus on reattracting locals: Each market is committed growing local demand as the basis for authenticity with the recognition that tourists are attracted to places that are genuine.
- Increasing diversity and representation: In different ways and to different degrees, the markets’ Food Life programs are linked to fostering diversity of vendors and visitors.

Case Study Summary

Borough Market (London), one of London’s most storied public markets, celebrated its “thousand year” anniversary in 2014. The twin challenges of Brexit, which eliminated the advantage of common market access to European food producers, and COVID-19, which decimated food producers, created a crisis for the Market. The Market’s Trust set a new mission of a “Food Policy” in 2022. The Food Policy’s principles are quality, environmental sustainability, social and economic sustainability, animal welfare, knowledge and transparency around sourcing, supporting small business, promoting health, embracing cultural and ethnic variety, and



offering a mix of price points. To embed these principles into the Market’s offerings, this entails:

- Reviewing the entire offering mix to assess its alignment with Food Policy principles
- Integrating Food Policy into decisions to optimize impact across the Market and its roster of vendors
- Creating clear quality standards for vendors and supporting, meeting, and exceeding these criteria, and implementing an audit process to ensure standards are met
- Evolving the offering mix to meet the Market’s charitable objectives
- Exploring ways Market assets can be used to the benefit of locals

In order to enact curation of Food Life, Borough Market chose to create a new position of “Trader Development Manager” to oversee its curation process.

Borough Market’s Trust has also earmarked a broad DEI program to “... ensure diversity, equity and inclusion is front of mind for everything we do - the people we hire, the food we sell, the enterprises we support, and the customers we attract.” Initiatives include:

- Supporting vendors to hire from diverse backgrounds that mirror the local community and Greater London

- Conducting a Market-wide DEI audit and setting KPI’s and anti-bias procedures
- Looking beyond Market boundaries to address ethical food sourcing from abroad.

As part of this effort, the Market also launched a series of place-based initiatives, including a Market-wide physical master plan with journey mapping, use analysis, and boundary/ zone definition within the Market campus.

Reading Terminal Market (Philadelphia)

first opened in 1893 and has operated in its current location and largely in its original form for over 130 years. The presence of produce farmers has fallen precipitously with structural changes in the regional food distribution system and the opening of 68 neighborhood groceries since the pandemic. The Market emerged from the pandemic determined to focus on its local community over its role as a top tourist destination, initiating a strategic planning process in 2019. Its Food Life strategy focuses on three initiatives to regain local demand:

- Enhancing multi-cultural Food Life focused on distinct offerings that represent “Philly’s diverse array of established and evolving culinary traditions and innovations.” This includes a shift in merchant mix with a focus on specialty food, dining, and regional food products. The Market has introduced upcycled food products from local producers as well as prepared foods, “freeze-dried fresh” products, and “ready to cook” offerings.



- Investing in design adaptations to create community gathering spaces, including an outdoor seating and event space on Filbert Street.
- Expanding delivery and pick-up capabilities in a partnership with Instacart.

The Market has also embraced the diversity of the Philadelphia community through:

- Launching “Breaking Bread-Breaking Barriers” to bring diverse ethnic groups to meet around cultural food sharing experiences.
- Expanding efforts to support launching minority-owned businesses with the Market’s Day Cart Bazaar and a new incubator.
- Creating relationships, sourcing support, and events that build on longstanding relationships with diverse producers such as Asian farmers, and Amish and Mennonite farmers.
- Continuing to ensure that offerings reflect the evolving cultural mix of the city.

St. Lawrence Market (Toronto) has existed since 1803, located in what was the historic Town of York; it is today composed of a precinct of Market structures. In 2016-2017, it developed a 5-year Strategic Plan that embraced a dual strategy to regain its historic role as a community hub of Food Life while also supporting Toronto’s ambitions to become an international food destination. The Strategic Plan addresses a variety of concerns, including the need to increase local residents’ affinity for the Market, the need to better engage the Market’s producers, the need for placemaking improvements, and the need for a stronger brand identity aligned with its core mission. The Strategic Plan’s core initiatives are:

- Positioning the Market as a leading Food Life institution for Toronto’s pan-cultural food

scene through the curation of food offerings, products, and events that position the Market as both a local food destination and a must-see on the visitor itinerary. The Market is also seeking to address producer challenges to increase participation as a key aspect of embracing Food Life.

- Creating space for local community as the basis of authenticity. The Market is developing new places, products, and programming to support local use of the Market complex as a social convening point, source of identity, and anchor for the evolving neighborhood. This included redeveloping the North Market as a mixed-use “green” market structure for community events such as a Saturday Farmers Market, and an upper-level community hall.
- Better integration with the surrounding St. Lawrence neighborhood in the wake of significant development, including partnering with the neighborhood Business Improvement Area to preserve the character of the district and to make the Market a community hub through placemaking.

To increase diversity, the Market is:

- Working to ensure that the Market’s offerings reflect the rich ethnic diversity of the St. Lawrence neighborhood and Toronto - the most ethnically diverse city in North America.
- Working to secure relationships with under-represented small farms run by underrepresented minorities and First Nations organizations in concert with the Farmers Market Committee.



Granville Island Public Market (Vancouver)

was developed as a conversion of an industrial island to a market-dining-cultural destination in 1979. It created a 2040 Strategy to address a range of challenges including the decline of local demand due to a proliferation of neighborhood groceries and dining options. A cornerstone of this Strategy is a commitment to establish Granville Island as Vancouver's leading food destination and as an international center of innovation in the culinary arts. It includes:

- Defining a Food Life program distinct from local groceries to attract locals. This includes specialty produce and regional culinary offerings, centered on the pan-cultural and ethnic culinary traditions of British Columbia and multicultural Vancouver. The Market is conducting further assessment of a variety of initiatives:
- Creating demonstration kitchens for food experiences and education
- Creating public flex space for food-related events
- Curating a mix of restaurants representative of chef driven culinary innovation

- Attracting underrepresented food concepts including First Nations and other culturally diverse culinary traditions
- Creating evening operating hours to extend a range of food-related experiences into the evening
- Adding a seafood-oriented cluster of dining offerings on the waterfront
- The Food Life program will span an expanded Market District with additional buildings offering culinary products, new dining venues, and thematic Market experiences.

Granville Island is seeking outside expertise to develop and execute a defined curation process.

A key effort to increase diversity in the 2040 Strategy is the creation of a First Nations food and cultural experience in recognition of a rich culinary tradition.

The Market is also launching a strategic initiative to rebuild an arts destination on the island after the relocation of the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and as well as strategizing to increase multimodal transit access.

