

l'Association  
canadienne des études  
sur l'alimentation



Canadian  
Association for  
Food Studies

## **CAFS Community Feedback Survey Report**

April 23, 2025

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# Executive Summary

CAFS has begun a strategic planning process to review its impact and chart a course for the next five years. As part of this process, the CAFS membership and community was invited to fill out a survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather initial feedback regarding experiences with CAFS activities and offerings, membership benefits, communications, and feedback on how CAFS may improve in the future.

The survey was open from January 28, 2025 to February 27, 2025. 67 responses were received. Participants were offered the option to opt-in to a more detailed follow-up interview at the end of the survey. 5 of the 67 respondents opted-in.

## *Make-up of the Survey Respondents*

CAFS was established twenty years ago as a scholarly association designed to bring together and connect those studying or with a strong interest in food studies. The respondent pool reflected this academic orientation, with 80% affiliated with post-secondary institutions.

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) noted that they are or were engaged in the CAFS community as a board member, conference planning co-chair, lead of a member project or committee, or on the editorial team of CAFS journal *Canadian Food Studies*. This is unsurprising given the organization is nearly entirely run by a volunteer team with the Board actively engaged in carrying out the activities of CAFS.

Respondents' areas of interest in food studies were diverse. The most frequently cited themes included food sovereignty, food security and insecurity, food systems and corporate control, decolonization and Indigenous rights, and environmental issues such as climate change and sustainability. Some respondents also highlighted intersections with gender, age, and identity.

## *The Role and Value of CAFS*

Throughout the survey, respondents were asked questions to help the CAFS Strategic Planning Committee understand interest areas, level of and type of engagement in CAFS activities, perception of benefits and value of membership, and areas for improvement.

Respondents noted the importance of CAFS as a facilitator and connector in the food studies community. Those who had been or are more engaged in CAFS activities noted that they have been able to make connections that have benefited them professionally and personally.

The survey responses highlighted the importance of CAFS activities. In particular, the conference and journal (reading or publishing in) were activities that many respondents have participated in. When asked about one activity they'd recommend resources be focused, many

people identified the conference. Throughout the survey, respondents reiterated the value of CAFS as a connector, expressing a desire for more online and offline events to connect with others in the food studies community.

Unsurprisingly, the top 3 motivations for participating in CAFS activities were also the top 3 ranked benefits. These were:

- Networking with other food scholars/practitioners
- Access to Information/Knowledge, and
- Advancing Food Studies Scholarship in Canada and on Indigenous territories

It will be important to consider these top motivators and benefits in designing the future of the organization. Furthermore, it may be useful to better understand why “Advancing Food Studies Scholarship in Canada” is important to the community, and what forms (e.g., activities, programs) the community envisions this can take.

### *Areas for Improvement*

While respondents were generally positive about CAFS’s work, several areas for improvement emerged.

Regarding governance, while many respondents expressed positive sentiment regarding enthusiasm of members and collegial culture of the association, several respondents also noted the need for clearer roles and responsibilities, and a general lack of clarity on the non-hierarchical model of the board. Several people also noted the overreliance on a small group of active members for the bulk of CAFS work. These comments highlight the importance of investigating more sustainable methods to work and fund the work of CAFS.

There was also a strong call for more regular opportunities to connect—beyond the conference—and to strengthen CAFS’s communications and accessibility. Many encouraged expanding virtual offerings, building regional presence, and increasing support for students and underrepresented voices.

### *Looking Ahead*

This survey is an important first step in understanding the CAFS community and setting the foundation for strategic planning. Since only 67 responses were received, it is important to identify alternative ways to engage the community and bring them into the conversation. That being said, the survey has revealed many opportunities for CAFS to explore as it continues its strategic planning process. Feedback from its members and the broader food studies community will be essential to articulating a vision for the future, a clarified role, within the scholarly community and beyond, and one that leverages its existing strengths and benefits.

# Background

As CAFS enters its twentieth year, the organization has begun a strategic planning process to review its impact and chart a course for the next five years. Facilitated by the CAFS Strategic Planning Committee, the process seeks to meaningfully engage the CAFS membership and community, including scholars, researchers, practitioners, and community members interested in the evolving discipline of food studies.

This engagement includes a feedback survey, a series of interviews, and world cafe sessions to gather initial inputs to inform a draft strategic plan. This report summarizes the results of a feedback survey that was conducted from January 28, 2025 to February 27, 2025. A total of 67 responses were received over the survey period.

## Methodology

The primary purpose of the survey was to gather initial feedback regarding experiences with CAFS activities and offerings, membership benefits, communications, and feedback on how CAFS may improve in the future. A secondary but equally important objective was to collect information about the CAFS community, including demographic data, role within CAFS, role and interests within food studies, and institution and/or affiliation (if any). A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A of this report.

The survey was shared via email with the CAFS Listserv and emailed directly to CAFS current and past Board Members, as well as others who are or have been engaged in CAFS work.

At the end of the survey, respondents were able to opt-in to be interviewed as part of the strategic planning process. 5 respondents opted-in to participate in a follow up interview.

Survey respondents were also offered the opportunity to enter into a draw for a chance to win a \$30 prize. A winner was randomly selected on February 28th, 2025.

## Summary of Responses

### Information about Respondents

The first section of the survey included a series of questions regarding the respondent and their involvement with CAFS to-date.

## Role in CAFS

Nearly half of survey respondents (47.8%) were or are heavily involved in the functioning of CAFS in a role as either a Board Member, Conference Chair or Co-Chair, a Lead of a Member Project, and/or member of the Journal editorial team. Of these survey respondents, 22 respondents identified as current or past Board Members. 10 identified as members of a CAFS working group or committee, and equal numbers (8 each) identified as founding members, conference planning co-chairs, and/or journal editors.

Of the 67 total responses received, 35.8% of respondents noted they are general members of CAFS and 11.9% of respondents noted they are only the listserv only.

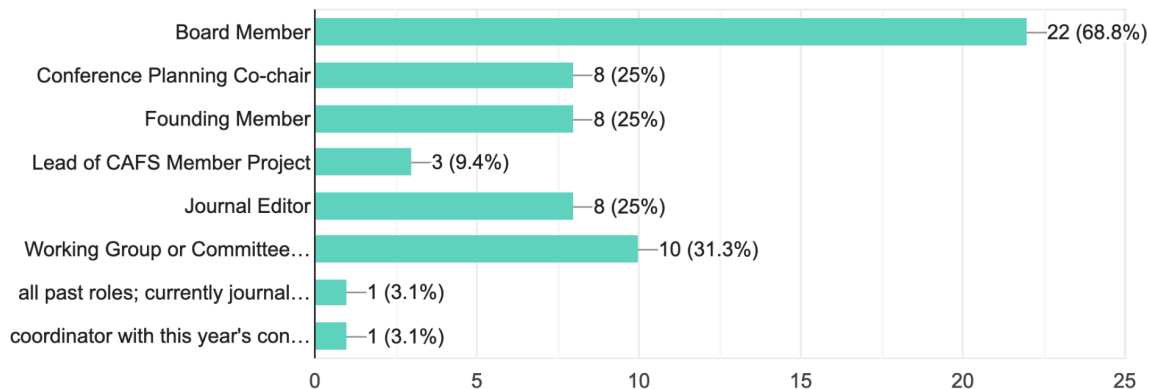
Figure 1: Pie Chart Breakdown of Respondent Role in CAFS

How are/were you involved in CAFS?  
67 responses



Figure 2: More detailed Role Breakdown within CAFS

What was/is your role with CAFS? (Please check all that apply)  
32 responses



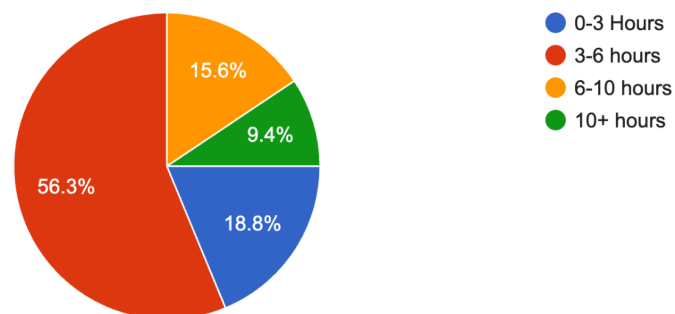
## Time Spent on CAFS-related Work

Respondents who took on roles with deeper engagement in CAFS generally spent three to six hours carrying out their roles on a monthly basis. About 25% of respondents spent more than 6 hours on CAFS-related work.

Figure 3: Pie Chart of Average Hours Spent on CAFS

On average, approximately how many hours did/do you spend carrying out your role as part of CAFS on a monthly basis?

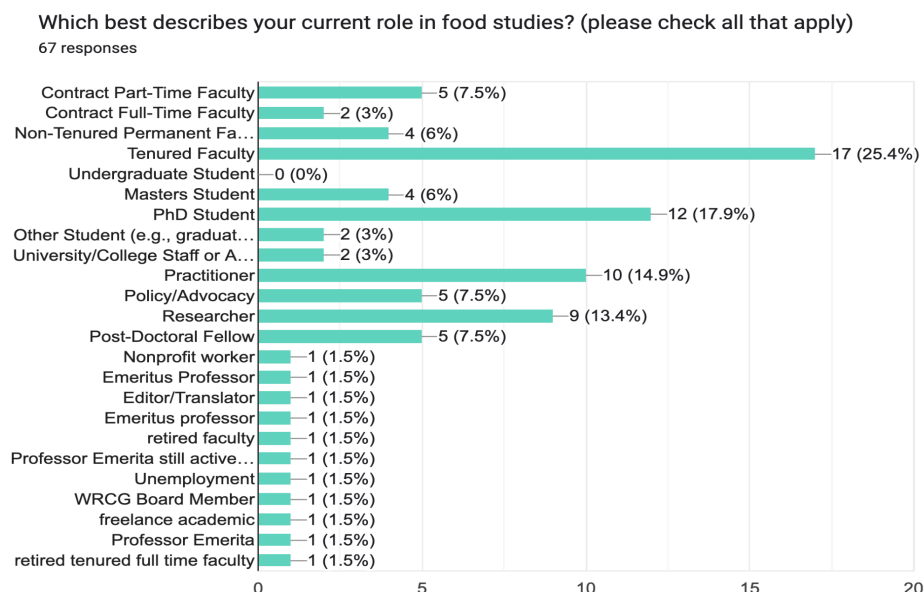
32 responses



## Role in Food Studies

To better understand the make-up of the CAFS community, respondents were asked to identify the role(s) they hold or held within the food studies space. In some cases, respondents were part of more than one category (e.g., researcher and practitioner, tenured faculty and practitioner, etc). Overall, tenured faculty made up the largest share of respondents (17 respondents), with PhD students, practitioners, and researchers making up the next largest cohorts of respondents. Notably, no respondents identified as undergraduate students. The vast majority of respondents are in roles within academia. It's unclear whether respondents who identified as practitioners are within academia.

Figure 4: Bar Chart of Respondent Current Role in Food Studies

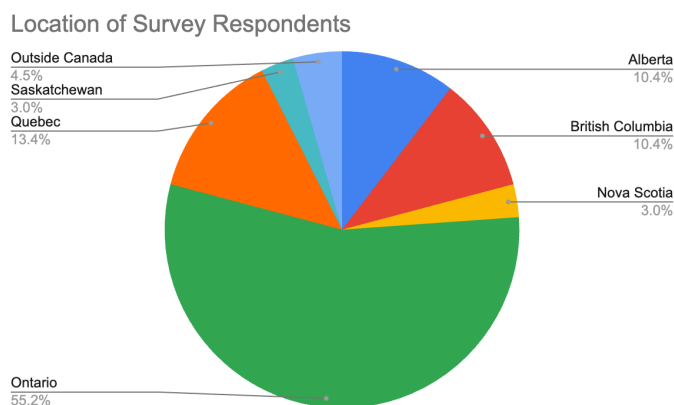


## Location in Canada

While there was general representation from Canadian regions (i.e., Western Canada, the Prairies, Central Canada, and the Maritimes), there were no respondents specifically from the Territories, PEI, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba.

Most respondents are from Central Canada, including 55.4% in Ontario and 13.4% in Quebec. Respondents from Western Canada (British Columbia and Alberta) made up 20.8% of survey takers, and there was some representation from the Prairies (3%, Saskatchewan), and Nova Scotia (3%).

Figure 5: Pie Chart Respondent Location in Canada

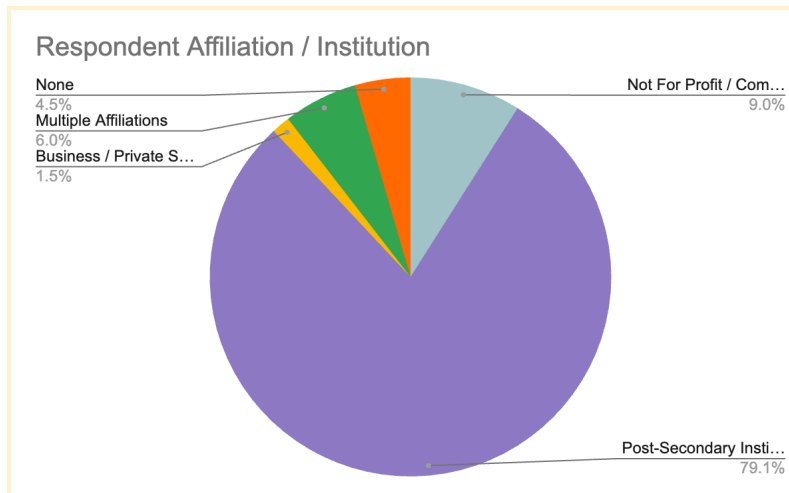




## Affiliation

To understand how CAFS may evolve to serve member and community needs, the Strategic Planning Committee was interested to understand the various professional and personal organizations its community may be affiliated with. The majority of respondents identified as affiliated with a post-secondary institution (79%). Respondents affiliated with a not-for-profit and/or community-based organization made up the second largest proportion (9%).

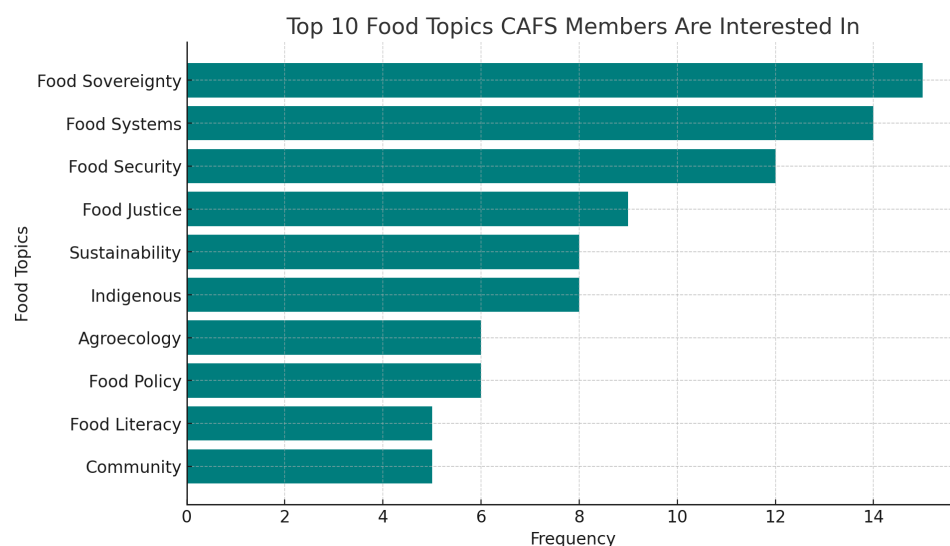
Figure 6: Respondent Affiliation and/or Institution



## Food Studies Interest Areas

In order to understand the topics and areas of interest to inform strategic planning and direction of CAFS work, respondents were asked to specify their area(s) of interest in food studies. The responses were coded and grouped into broader categories noted in the bar chart below. Food sovereignty, food systems, and food security were the top themes and areas of interest that emerged.

Figure 7: Bar Chart of Top 10 Food Topics



## Emerging Trends and Issues in Food Studies

Respondents were also asked to identify emerging trends or issues that concern or interest them. From the responses received, food sovereignty, climate change, food insecurity, and indigenous rights and decolonization were identified most frequently. The table below provides a summary of the top 20 trends or concerns that were identified most frequently. Other noteworthy themes not captured below include food identity, ethnic enclaves, ageism in food systems, and food and gender.

Table 1: Top 20 Emerging Food Trends/Concerns

Term	Frequency	Example Phrases
<b>food sovereignty</b>	8	Indigenous sovereignty, decolonial land justice
<b>climate change</b>	7	Climate chaos, resilience, biodiversity impact
<b>food insecurity</b>	7	Rising rates, weaponization, accessibility
<b>Indigenous</b>	6	Landback, Indigenous food systems
<b>corporate control</b>	5	Corporate power, agrifood monopolies
<b>sustainability</b>	5	Environmental/social sustainability, regenerative
<b>agroecology</b>	4	Sustainable agriculture, scalable solutions
<b>food systems</b>	4	Decolonization, pedagogy, urban systems
<b>land justice</b>	3	Land access, Landback movements
<b>food security</b>	3	Policy, climate-linked risks
<b>seed activism</b>	2	Seed saving, enclosure resistance
<b>urban agriculture</b>	2	Peri-urban farming, local response
<b>decolonization</b>	2	Decolonial thinking, practices
<b>food pedagogy</b>	2	Education, youth literacy
<b>social movements</b>	2	Responses to crises, corporate resistance
<b>ultra-processed food</b>	2	Nutrition transitions, health impacts

Term	Frequency	Example Phrases
geopolitical disruption	2	Trade tariffs, food as weapon
food labour	2	Exploitation, migrant workers
alternative food movements	2	Grassroots initiatives, local networks
biodiversity	2	Impact of food production

## CAFS Activities

The Strategic Planning Committee was interested in understanding how the CAFS community currently engages in CAFS activities, including methods of engagement, motivations for engaging, and areas for improvement. Respondents were also asked a series of questions to help the committee understand perceptions of its activities to inform prioritization decisions regarding limited organizational resources.

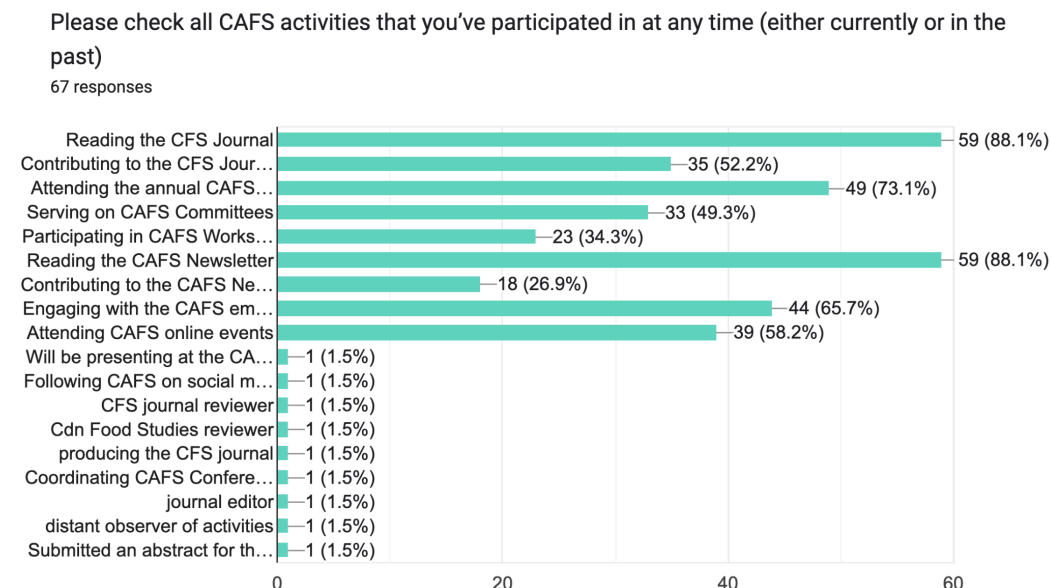
Currently, CAFS activities include the following:

- Annual conference that brings together our membership and others interested in food studies
- Webinars / Online sessions
- Open-access journal *Canadian Food Studies*
- Bi-annual newsletter
- Ad-Hoc Committees and Working Groups on issues concerning CAFS and its community
- Listserv

## Participation and Views

The vast majority of respondents participated in reading the CFS Journal (88.1%) and CAFS Newsletter (88.1%). Many respondents have attended the annual conference (73.1%) or other online events (58.2%). A smaller, but still large number, engage with CAFS through the email listserv (65.7%), and contribute to the journal (52.2%).

Figure 8: Bar Chart of CAFS Activities Respondent has Participated In



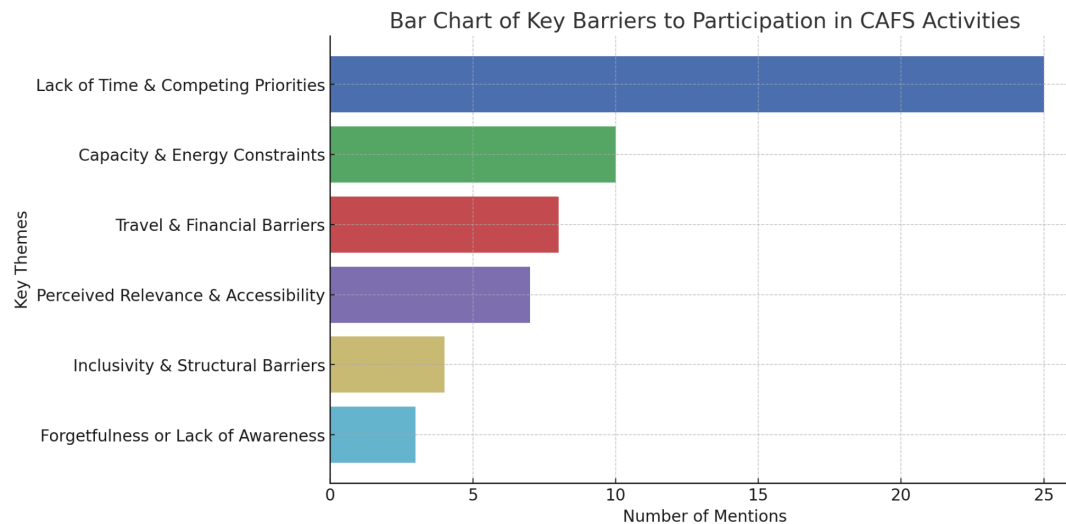
## Barriers to Participation

Understanding motivations and barriers to participation in CAFS activities can inform how CAFS can evolve its activities to encourage deeper engagement with its work.

The most commonly cited barrier to participation was a lack of time and competing priorities. For many respondents, balancing work, research, teaching, and other personal commitments posed a barrier to participating more in the association's activities. Some mentioned specific conflicts, such as overlapping conferences or seasonal work (e.g., farming). A few noted that food studies are a secondary focus for them, limiting their involvement. Along the same vein, capacity and energy constraints were cited as a barrier to participating more. In particular, some respondents noted bandwidth limitations for unpaid labour.

Other barriers include financial and travel, perceived relevance and accessibility of CAFS, and inclusivity and structural barriers. These areas are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 9: Bar Chart of Key Barriers to Participation



#### Travel & Financial Barriers

- Conference travel costs were a recurring concern.
- Some noted they could only attend events every few years due to financial constraints.

#### Perceived Relevance & Accessibility (14% of those who provided a response)

- A few respondents felt their research wasn't "food studies enough" or aligned with CAFS' focus.
- Others mentioned a desire for more practical, applied content rather than strictly academic discussions.
- One person noted limited opportunities to engage in French.

#### Inclusivity & Structural Barriers

- A participant pointed out the lack of childcare options as a barrier.
- Another highlighted the "insularity & echo chamber" of Canadian scholarship.

#### Forgetfulness or Lack of Awareness

- A few respondents simply forgot about membership opportunities or didn't feel a strong pull to participate.

#### Possible Actions for Improvement

- **Flexible Engagement Options:** Offer more asynchronous opportunities, such as recorded webinars, discussion boards, and online networking spaces.

- **Micro-Volunteering:** Provide smaller, time-limited roles for members who want to contribute but have limited availability.
- **Travel & Conference Support:** Explore travel bursaries or virtual conference options to help members attend events.
- **Diversify Programming:** Ensure activities appeal to both academic and non-academic members (e.g., more practitioner-focused content).
- **Regional & Virtual Engagement:** Offer more local meetups or hybrid events to accommodate those who cannot travel.
- **Multilingual Inclusivity:** Expand opportunities for French-language engagement.
- **Proactive Communication:** Develop targeted reminders about CAFS membership benefits and event opportunities.
- **More Networking Opportunities:** Create structured spaces for members to connect, especially for newer and international members.

## Priority Areas for CAFS Community and Membership

In order to understand the priority areas for our community, respondents were asked to choose **one** CAFS activity that they'd recommend resources be focused on. They were also asked if there are additional activities that CAFS could undertake that would be of value to them and (if there are,) what those would be.

The top five priority activities that emerged from the feedback are summarized below.

1. Conference (or CAFS Conference) / Annual Conference – 25 mentions
  - This includes the centrality of conferences, whether annual or specific to CAFS, as key opportunities for networking, learning, and community building.
2. CFS Journal – 14 mentions
  - The Canadian Food Studies journal is frequently noted as an important resource and priority for the CAFS community.
3. Supporting Students – 5 mentions
  - Responses related to student support, including networking opportunities, scholarships, career forums, and workshops specifically for students.
4. Online Events/Webinars – 6 mentions
  - The importance of accessible, virtual events like webinars, online workshops, and virtual meet-ups is frequently mentioned, as they allow broader participation.
5. Networking Opportunities (Local Meet-ups, Field-Based Activities, or Collaborative Events) – 5 mentions
  - There is a strong emphasis on creating more networking opportunities, both in-person and virtual, with suggestions for local meet-ups, collaborations with organizations, and professional networking.

The central themes that underpin the noted priority activities emphasize CAFS's role and strengths in community engagement, accessibility, and professional development within the CAFS community. Respondents highlighted several key priorities, including:

1. Networking and Community Building:
  - The conference was often identified as the central space for community building and networking, but there was also a strong call for local meet-ups and student-focused networking opportunities throughout the year.
2. Educational Resources and Professional Development:
  - The CFS Journal was recognized as a critical resource for scholarly exchange, while online events, webinars, and workshops were seen as vital tools for offering accessible education and professional development to a wider audience.
3. Student Support and Development:
  - Respondents consistently emphasized the need for student support, whether through career development resources, mentorship programs, or student-focused networking and workshops.
4. Accessibility and Inclusivity:
  - There was a significant focus on making events and resources more accessible to a broader audience, particularly through online events, open-access journals, and the flexibility of virtual formats.

In summary, the responses indicate a strong desire to strengthen connections within the community, expand access to educational opportunities, and ensure greater support for students as key priorities for CAFS moving forward. More detailed feedback regarding improvements and opportunities in each of the five activity areas is included in Appendix B.

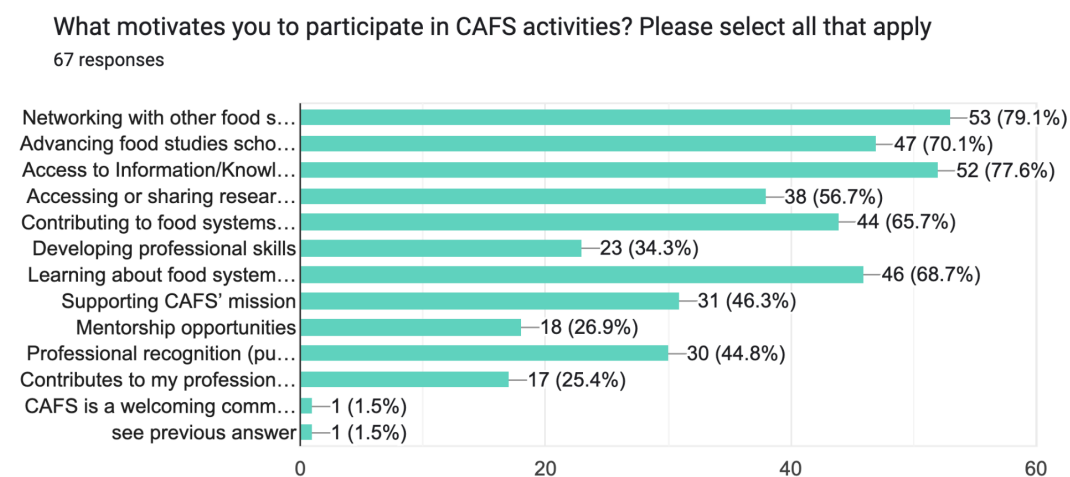
## Motivations for Participating in CAFS

The Strategic Planning Committee was curious to understand the reasons and motivations for the CAFS community to participate in the association's activities. Understanding motivations would help CAFS identify its value proposition and inform decision-making to align its activities with desires of the community.

The top 3 most popularly noted motivations for participating in CAFS activities are:

- Networking with other food scholars/practitioners (79.1%)
- Access to Information/Knowledge (77.6%), and
- Advancing Food Studies Scholarship in Canada and on Indigenous territories (70.1%).

Figure 10: Bar Chart of Respondent Motivations to Participate in CAFS

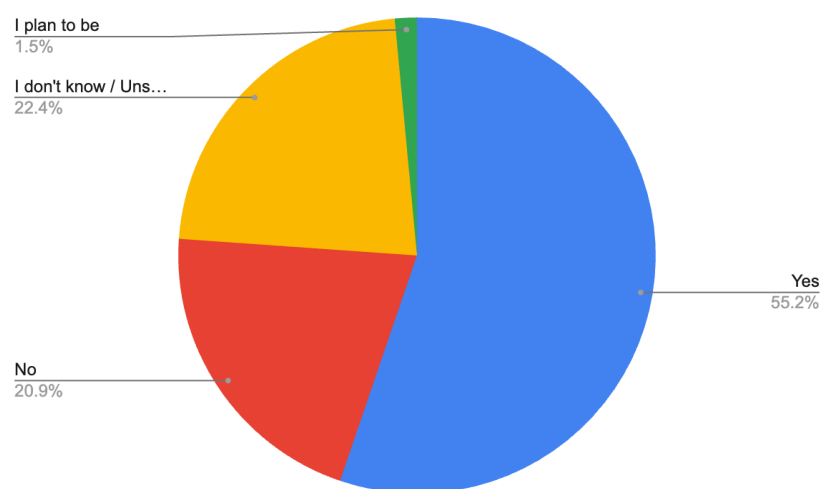


Based on this, CAFS may consider focusing efforts and resources on creating more opportunities for networking, sharing information/knowledge, and building a community of members with an interest to advance food studies scholarship in Canada. Future engagements with the membership may seek to understand deeper motivations behind a desire to advance food studies scholarship.

## CAFS Membership and Benefits

Membership fees are one of the main revenue sources for CAFS activities. Of the 67 respondents, approximately half noted that they are currently paid members of CAFS.

Figure 11: Are you currently a paid member of CAFS (i.e., are your membership dues up-to-date)?





## Most Important Membership Benefits

Respondents were also asked to select and rank the top five benefits of CAFS membership. The responses for this question align with the top three motivations for participating in CAFS activities.

- 30 respondents identified “Networking with Other Food Studies Scholars / Practitioners” as the most important benefit.
- The second most highly ranked benefit was “Advancing Food Studies Scholarship in Canada and on Indigenous territories (24 respondents ranked this as most important).
- Third most highly ranked benefit was “Access to Information / Knowledge”.

CAFS may consider exploring ways to deepen its ability to deliver on these top three cited benefits.

## Other Benefits Members Would Like to See

Respondents were also asked if there are other benefits that they’d like to see. 24 respondents provided an answer to this question, summarized into the following five categories: Professional Development and Member Benefits, Building Connections and Partnerships, Advocacy and Policy Engagement, and Journal and Knowledge Exchange.

### 1. Professional Development and Member Benefits

- **Mentorship Opportunities:** Several respondents emphasized the value of **mentorship** and suggested that CAFS could be more active in supporting these relationships.
- **Guides and Resources:** Suggestions included creating **guides to help implement food studies initiatives** (e.g., starting food coalitions) and sharing **pedagogical resources**.
- **Increased Benefits for Volunteers:** A call for ensuring that **board members and volunteers gain more tangible benefits** from their service.

### 2. Building Connections and Partnerships

- **Collaborative Memberships:** Some respondents proposed **joint memberships** with related academic associations (e.g., geography, history, Indigenous studies).
- **Interdisciplinary Networking:** Suggested **engaging scholars from different disciplines** to promote new perspectives and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Coalitions and Partnerships:** Building **coalitions with other sectors** for social movement actions and policy advocacy.
- **Provincial/Regional Offshoots:** Interest in forming **local or provincial groups** to enhance regional connections.

### 3. Advocacy and Policy Engagement

- **Direct Advocacy:** Building relationships with policymakers and engaging in **advocacy for food system-related issues**.
- **Systemic Solutions:** Calls for CAFS to contribute to **cohesive, systemic solutions for food insecurity, inequality, and marginalized communities**.

#### 4. Journal and Knowledge Exchange

- **Open Access Journals and Special Issues:** Suggestions for **exchanges with other open-access journals** to share best practices and explore joint special issues (e.g., on topics like food and carceral systems).

#### 5. Positive Feedback and Satisfaction

- Several respondents expressed that they are generally **pleased with the current benefits** provided by CAFS, praising the organization's focus on food justice, equity, and networking.

#### 6. Other Suggestions

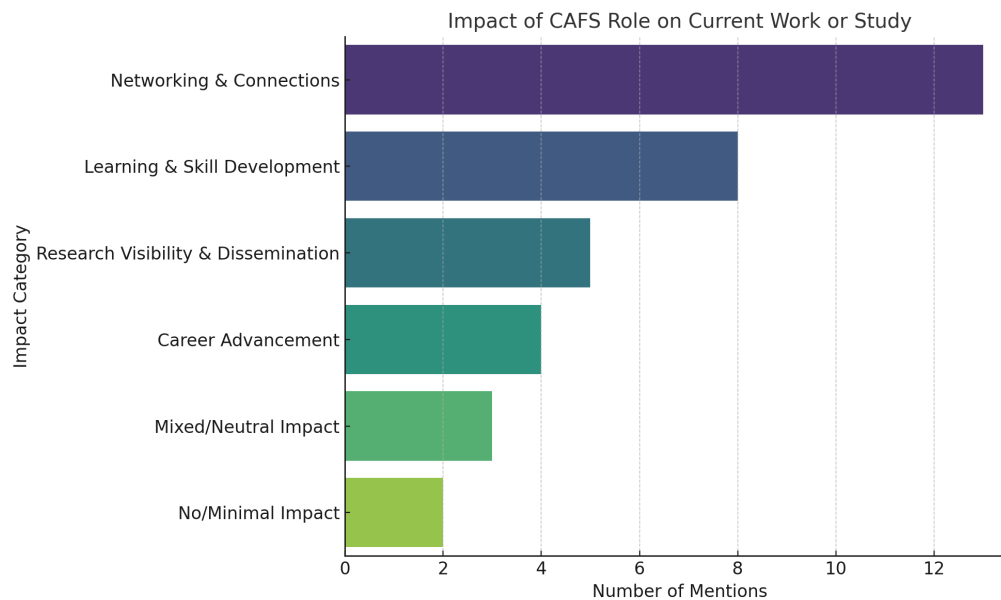
- **Dialogue with Policymakers:** Hosting dialogue sessions with policymakers to connect research with real-world impact.
- **Annual Conference and Listserv:** Recognition that maintaining the annual conference, journal, and listserv is already a valuable service.

### Impact of CAFS Membership

Respondents who are or have been more heavily engaged in CAFS work were asked how their role has helped in their current work or study (if at all). In qualitative terms, CAFS has served as a professional learning community, a platform for scholarly visibility, and a hub for interdisciplinary networking. Most members found value in social and professional connections, while others emphasized skill-building or institutional recognition. A few respondents highlighted the need for clearer support in leadership roles, and a minority saw limited relevance due to discipline alignment or newness to the organization.

Many respondents noted that their involvement has helped to establish networks and professional connections, which have led to academic collaborations, new perspectives through intergenerational or interdisciplinary engagement, and a sense of belonging or community within a niche research area.

Figure 12: Bar Chart on Impact of CAFS Role on Current Work or Study



### Learning by Doing / Skill Development

Many respondents highlighted that CAFS roles (e.g., organizing conferences, serving on committees) provided experiential learning opportunities. These allowed them to:

- Understand the mechanics of academic event planning
- Gain skills transferable to other professional contexts (e.g., event coordination, academic publishing)

*"Understanding how national conferences are organized... was eye opening."*

*"I'm considering applying for Event Coordinator positions... I will use that as relevant experience."*

### Research Exposure & Dissemination

Several respondents benefited from having their work shared through CAFS channels (newsletters, conferences), which helped raise their visibility within the field.

*"A paper I had published was shared through the newsletter."*

*"Yes, it helps promote my work and further food studies research."*

### Legitimacy & Academic Advancement

For a few respondents, CAFS added credibility to their professional identity in food studies, contributed to their tenure dossier, or supported the academic value of their work.

*"It contributed to my tenure application."*

*"It adds legitimacy to my engagement with food issues."*

## Learning About the Field / Keeping Informed

Some mentioned CAFS helped them stay current with research trends or exposed them to work outside their immediate academic focus.

*"Helped me understand broad currents in Canadian food studies."*

*"Occasionally there is a paper distributed through the list-serv that is relevant to my work."*

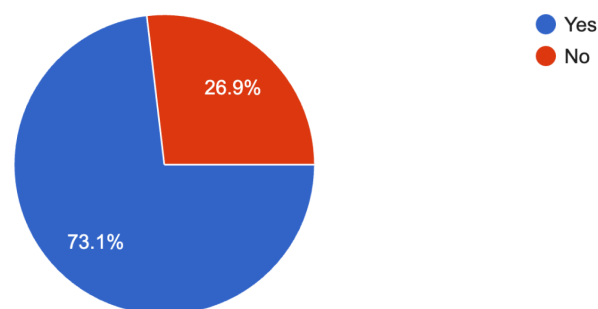
## Views on Updated Membership Fee Structure

A goal of CAFS is to be accessible and inclusive to people who are interested in joining the association. As such, the membership fee structure was recently updated to reflect income levels. As part of the survey, we were interested in understanding whether the fee structure is accessible. The majority of respondents noted it is accessible.

Figure 13: Accessibility of Updated Membership Fee Model

Our current membership fee structure (below) was recently revised to reflect income level, with the aim of ensuring equitable access to those interested... on your experience, is the fee accessible for you?

67 responses



## Views on Communication and Outreach

CAFS currently engages with its community through multiple online platforms. Respondents were asked a series of questions to gauge the respondent views on the efficacy of current communication channels.

For the most part, respondents noted that CAFS is very effective or somewhat effective in its communications. However, 15% of respondents expressed neutral sentiments about efficacy, suggesting that there are opportunities to improve efficacy of communication practices.

Figure 14: Bar Chart on Current Engagement with Communication Channels

What ways do you currently engage with CAFS through our communication channels? (Check all that apply)

67 responses

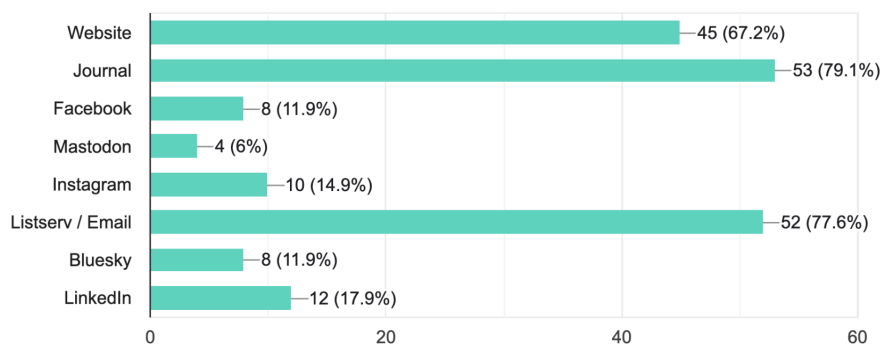
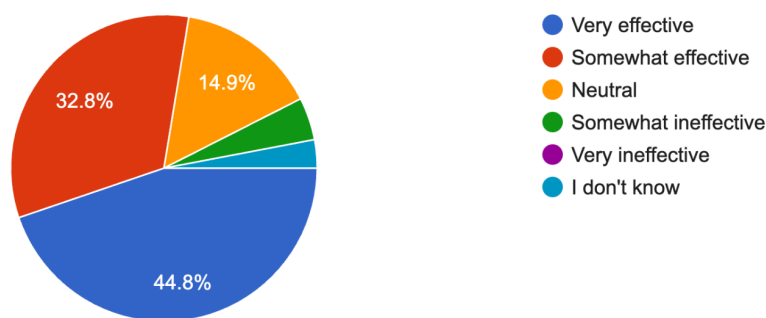


Figure 15: Pie Chart on Effectiveness of Communications

How effective is CAFS at communicating with members about organizational decisions, events, and opportunities?

67 responses



## Feedback and Areas for Improvement

Respondents were asked to share any comments/feedback about CAFS communication channels. Multiple respondents praised the listserv for being informative, well-used, and respectful. Several people also noted the newsletter as a valuable place for keeping up with publications and opportunities. Some noted that CAFS has made strong improvements in

communication via social media. Specific mention for Michelle Ryan's efforts was mentioned more than once:

*"I have been impressed with how attentive Michelle Ryan has been to animating CAFS' various social media platforms."*

Feedback gathered was sorted into two categories: what members would like to see more of and what members would like to see less of. These areas, summarized below, could be considered by CAFS for further work.

Members want more of:

- **Transparency and updates** about CAFS operations and challenges
- **Engaging visual content** on social media
- **Opportunities for dialogue**, user-generated content, and policy-oriented work

Members want less of:

- **Email overload**, especially from high-frequency sends like the Thursday showcase
- **Repetitive visuals** on platforms like Instagram
- **Long or overly detailed communications**

## CAFS Governance and Decision-Making

Respondents were asked to share anything they'd like us to know regarding their experience with the CAFS Board of Directors and decision-making processes.

### Strengths and Challenges

Themes were identified from the responses and organized into strengths and challenges in governance. Generally, there were positive sentiments regarding the energy and willingness of members to work together. Challenges noted included lack of role clarity, onboarding, over-reliance on small group of active members, and lack of strategic focus.

Table 2: Summary of Governance-Related Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
Collegiality and goodwill among members	Lack of role clarity and onboarding
Opportunities for learning and growth	Poor knowledge transfer and institutional memory
Recent improvements in leadership and organization	Over-reliance on a small group of active members
Commitment to democratizing structure	Confusion from unclear or overly flat structures
Enthusiasm from new and emerging scholars	Lack of strategic focus beyond conference planning

### 1. Lack of Clarity Around Roles and Responsibilities

This was one of the most consistent concerns. Respondents frequently noted confusion about their roles—both at the outset and throughout their tenure. While some appreciated the learning experience, many expressed that the ambiguity led to inefficiencies, unrealistic expectations, and limited strategic engagement.

*“Clarity around my role and responsibilities SEEMED clear up front, but... there was a lot more muddiness.”*

*“I found myself in a role I didn’t know existed... talking about these roles initially could have been much better.”*

### 2. Knowledge Transfer and Continuity Issues

Many respondents flagged the **lack of institutional memory** as a recurring challenge. The frequent turnover of board members, without mechanisms for passing down knowledge or systems, contributes to a sense of “reinventing the wheel” each year.

*“Knowledge and experience... are not rolled over from year to year.”*

*“There is enormous history within the community that doesn’t seem to transfer...”*

### 3. Labor Imbalance and Burnout

Another common theme was that **labour is unevenly distributed**, often falling on graduate students or a small number of active members, especially due to the difficulty of recruiting tenured faculty or more experienced members. Some felt overburdened by the workload—especially when board duties revolve heavily around conference organizing.

*“Very difficult to do anything beyond organizing the conference.”*

*“CAFS finances are very disorganized, the board performs a lot of unpaid labour.”*

### 4. Board Structure and Decision-Making Process Concerns

Several respondents critiqued the current collective or non-hierarchical structure of the board. While some appreciate the democratic intent, others found it confusing or even silencing.

*"The current Board structure is unmanageable... it complicates instead of simplifying."  
"It feels like a place to give working updates, rather than a strategic decision body."*

## 5. Positive Experiences and Professional Growth

Despite structural concerns, some respondents expressed appreciation for the collegiality, the chance to learn, and the opportunity to build community. This was particularly noted by newer or first-time board members.

*"Being part of the board has been a great opportunity to improve my English skills and strengthen my sense of responsibility."  
"I am very grateful to be on the board and am looking forward to meeting others."*

## Outlier or Less Common Themes

### 1. Language and Cultural Learning

One French-speaking respondent noted how board participation helped improve their English and provided an opportunity to experience Canadian social organizational dynamics—a unique benefit not commonly mentioned by others.

### 2. Historical Reflections and Optimism

Some responses referenced past experiences (from years ago) and pointed to recent improvements under the current board.

*"There has been tremendous improvement in the past year... vital need to ensure all Board members understand their respective roles."*

### 3. Frustration with Vision and Ambition

A few respondents felt that the board is too focused on logistical tasks (mainly the conference) and not on broader field-building goals.

*"CAFS could be an association that accomplishes real, tangible goals... but that never quite happens beyond organizing a conference."*

## Alternative Revenues

As part of exploring options for longer-term financial sustainability of CAFS, respondents were asked if they would be willing to support CAFS's mission and activities in the form of a monetary donation. The majority of respondents (68.7%) noted they are not currently in a position to make

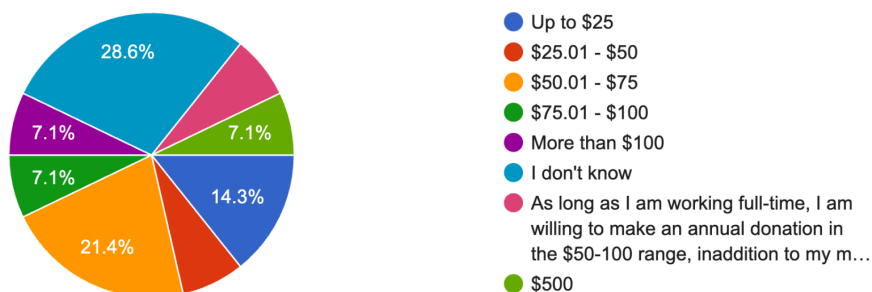


a donation. Of those who are able and/or would consider a donation (21%), 28% noted they did not know how much they would be able to donate annually.

Figure 16: Pie Chart on Possible Donation Amount

In the last question, you said you are or may be currently in a position to make a donation to support CAFS' mission and activities. How much would you be willing to donate annually?

14 responses



Respondents were also asked to provide any details regarding this possible donation. While only 9 people responded to this question, the general sentiment from the responses was a desire to know how the funds would be spent. Other notable responses include:

- Desire for funds to establish part-time positions,
- Tax deductibility
- Ensuring accessibility of CAFS activities to everyone

## Final Concluding Feedback

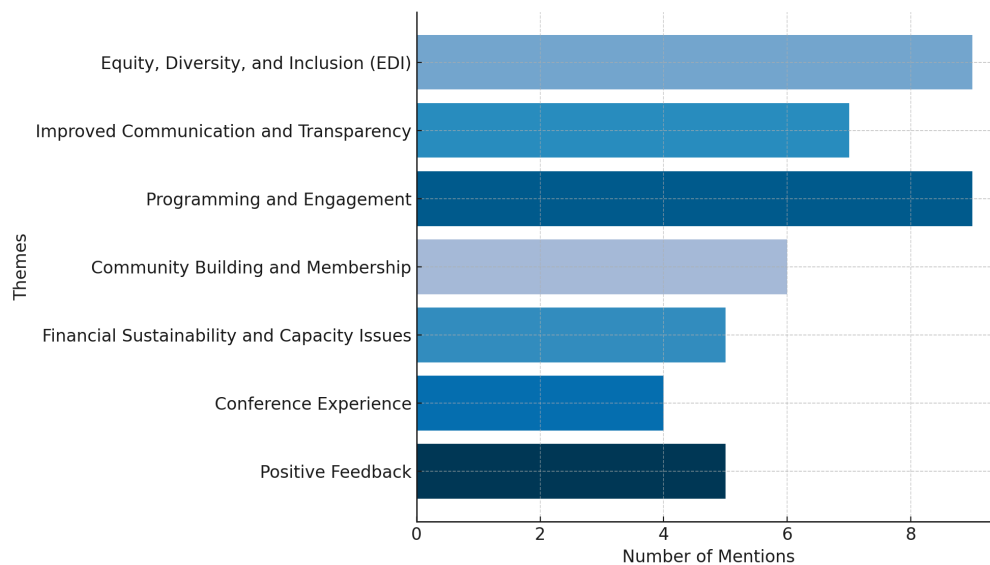
A primary purpose of the strategic planning process is to ensure CAFS continues to remain relevant to its members and community. As such, respondents were offered several opportunities throughout the survey to provide general and more specific feedback (about benefits, activities, etc). This section includes an overview of areas for improvement and general feedback.

### Areas for Improvement

Respondents were asked a general question about ways that CAFS could improve, including more transparent governance, enforcement of inclusion, more relevant programming, etc.

35 respondents provided an answer to this question. While many expressed appreciation for the work CAFS does, several areas for improvement emerged as well.

Figure 17: Bar Chart on Areas for Improvement



#### 1. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

- Several respondents highlighted the need for a consistent focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) in CAFS programming and governance.
- Some suggested increasing engagement with underrepresented groups, including Indigenous and Black communities, grassroots activists, and international voices.

#### 2. Improved Communication and Transparency

- Calls for more transparent governance were noted, with some respondents indicating they didn't understand CAFS' structure or leadership processes.
- Suggestions were made to improve the quality and consistency of CAFS' communications, including newsletters, website content, and professional presentation.

#### 3. Programming and Engagement

- Requests for more workshops, webinars, and learning opportunities to enhance member engagement, especially virtual programming for those outside the GTA.
- Suggestions for alternating in-person and virtual conferences and providing virtual networking opportunities.
- Desire for more relevant programming on issues like food security, academic freedoms, and food systems advocacy.

#### 4. Community Building and Membership

- Several responses emphasized the importance of building community among members through increased communication and collaboration.

- Ideas included mentorship opportunities, recruitment efforts to grow membership, and more engagement with practitioners and grassroots organizations.

## 5. Financial Sustainability and Capacity Issues

- Multiple respondents acknowledged the challenges of running CAFS primarily on volunteer efforts and suggested exploring ways to raise funds for paid part-time positions to prevent burnout.
- Suggestions for better financial planning and developing a long-term sustainability strategy were also noted.

## 6. Conference Experience

- Some feedback on improving the conference experience, particularly with regard to food provisioning that reflects CAFS' mission and reducing no-shows at professional events.
- There was also a call to use conferences as an opportunity to showcase local food systems and fieldwork.

The last question of the survey asked for any additional feedback they wished to share. 24 responses were received, summarized below.

- **Appreciation & Value** – Many expressed gratitude and recognized CAFS' role in building a supportive food studies community.
  - **Value of CAFS** – Several responses highlighted the importance of CAFS in building the food studies community, fostering connections, and creating a supportive environment for students and researchers.
  - **Volunteer Challenges** – Concerns were raised about the sustainability of a primarily volunteer-run organization.
  - **Advocacy vs. Scholarship** – Some emphasized that CAFS should support research that informs advocacy rather than engage in advocacy directly.
  - **Food Justice & Global Perspectives** – Calls to examine long-term solutions to food insecurity and continue engagement with social justice issues.
- Survey Feedback** – A minor issue was noted regarding a mandatory membership question.
- **Recognition of CAFS' Stance on Social Issues** – One respondent specifically appreciated CAFS for addressing anti-Black racism and food being used as a weapon of war.

# Looking Ahead

The findings from this survey offer valuable insights into the current strengths, challenges, and aspirations of the CAFS community. They paint a picture of a passionate,

engaged, and thoughtful membership that values CAFS as a space for connection, scholarship, and collaboration. While the survey responses affirm the relevance and impact of CAFS's core activities (e.g., the journal, conference, and networking opportunities), they also surface clear calls for more inclusive governance structures, improved communication, deeper support for students and volunteers, and greater accessibility across geographic and professional boundaries.

As CAFS moves forward in its strategic planning process, these insights will help shape a vision that is rooted in community needs, responsive to emerging trends, and aligned with the organization's values of equity, collaboration, and scholarly integrity. Continued engagement and co-creation with members will be key to building a vibrant and sustainable future for CAFS.

# Appendix A - Survey Questions

How are/were you involved in CAFS? MULTIPLE CHOICE

Which best describes your current role in food studies? (please check all that apply) MULTIPLE CHOICE

Please specify your area(s) of interest in food studies SHORT ANSWER

What emerging food-related trend or issue most interests and/or concerns you? SHORT ANSWER

What's your institution or affiliation? (University, College, Organization, Independent Contractor, No Institution/Affiliation, Other, etc). SHORT ANSWER

Where are you located? MULTIPLE CHOICE

What was/is your role with CAFS? (Please check all that apply) MULTIPLE CHOICE

Tell us more about your role with CAFS. What did your role entail? What were the main activities? What year(s) were you involved? SHORT ANSWER

On average, approximately how many hours did/do you spend carrying out your role as part of CAFS on a monthly basis? MULTIPLE CHOICE

Has your role in CAFS (either in the past or currently) helped you in your current work or study? If so, please share some details below. LONG ANSWER

Please share anything you'd like us to know regarding your experience with the CAFS Board of Directors and decision-making processes: (e.g., efficacy, efficiency, cLong Answer, rity of role and responsibilities, any other candid thoughts) LONG ANSWER

Please check all CAFS activities that you've participated in at any time (either currently or in the past) MULTIPLE CHOICE

If you had to choose one CAFS activity or area that you'd recommend we focus our resources on, which would that be? (If none, enter "n/a") SHORT ANSWER

SHORT ANSWER

What prevents and/or discourages you from participating more in CAFS activities? (If none, enter "n/a") SHORT ANSWER

What motivates you to participate in CAFS activities? Please select all that apply MULTIPLE CHOICE

From the list below, please select what you think the top 5 benefits are of CAFS membership and rank them ("1" being "most important benefit" and "5" being "least important benefit"). Rank MULTIPLE CHOICE

Are there any other benefits that you'd like to see? LONG ANSWER

What are some ways that you think CAFS can improve? (For example: more transparent governance, more enforcement of inclusion, more relevant programming, etc. If none, enter "n/a") LONG ANSWER

Our current membership fee structure (below) was recently revised to reflect income level, with the aim of ensuring equitable access to those interested in an individual CAFS membership.

Based on your experience, is the fee accessible for you? Y/N

Please share any feedback about the new fee structure (if none, enter "n/a") SHORT ANSWER

Are you currently in a position to make a donation to support CAFS' mission and activities? Y/N

If you are or may be currently in a position to make a donation to support CAFS' mission and activities. How much would you be willing to donate annually? MULTIPLE CHOICE

Please share anything else you'd like us to know about this possible donation (e.g., what you would like to see) LONG ANSWER

What ways do you currently engage with CAFS through our communication channels? (Check all that apply) MULTIPLE CHOICE

How effective is CAFS at communicating with members about organizational decisions, events, and opportunities? MULTIPLE CHOICE

Please share any comments / feedback you have regarding CAFS communication channels (e.g., is there anything you'd like to see more of? Less of?) LONG ANSWER

Are you currently a paid member of CAFS (i.e., are your membership dues up-to-date)? MULTIPLE CHOICE

If not a paid member: Please tell us why you're not currently a paid member. This information will help us with reviewing and evaluating current and future membership benefits. MULTIPLE CHOICE

Please share any additional feedback you have below. LONG ANSWER

# Appendix B - Feedback on Priority Activity Areas

## Feedback on the Conference

1. Importance of the Conference for Networking and Community Building:
  - Multiple responses emphasized the annual CAFS conference as the most important opportunity for members to come together, network, and share ideas. It's viewed as essential for connecting the food studies community and supporting collaborations between academics, students, and practitioners.
2. Content and Structure of the Conference:
  - Some responses suggested the content of the conference should evolve to be more advanced, with more focused discussions on food system change strategies, rather than introductory-level content. This reflects a desire for deeper, more specialized discussions as the field progresses.
3. Student Engagement at the Conference:
  - There were mentions of the conference being a valuable space for emerging scholars to network and grow, but also a call for more student-focused activities, such as dedicated sessions or networking opportunities that are tailored to their needs.
4. Accessibility and Format of the Conference:
  - Some responses indicated a preference for virtual or hybrid formats to make the conference more accessible to people who cannot attend in person due to geographical, financial, or other constraints. There was a recognition of the virtual conference held in 2021 as a positive example of widening participation.
5. Potential for Local Meet-ups:
  - Beyond the large annual event, there were suggestions for local meet-ups or smaller, regionally focused gatherings to help foster community connections throughout the year, especially for those who cannot attend the main conference.

In summary, the conference is seen as the central event for community building and networking within CAFS, with calls for more specialized content, better student engagement, and expanded accessibility through virtual options.

## Feedback on CFS Journal

1. Importance as a Scholarly Resource:
  - The CFS Journal was frequently highlighted as a key priority for the CAFS community, with several mentions of its value as an important scholarly resource. Many respondents viewed it as essential for disseminating research and advancing the field of food studies in Canada.
2. Support for Open Access:

- There was appreciation for the open-access model of the journal, allowing broad, free access to vital research, especially for those who may not have institutional access to academic databases. This was seen as an important way to democratize knowledge and share food studies research more widely.
- 3. Role in Community and Academic Engagement:
  - The journal was seen as an important tool for engaging both academics and practitioners, with some responses suggesting that it could be further leveraged to build a community of practice around food studies, connecting research with real-world application.
- 4. Suggestions for Growth and Improvement:
  - A few responses touched on expanding the journal's reach, such as through increased promotion or perhaps additional efforts to integrate multi-disciplinary perspectives. There were also calls for the journal to explore potential partnerships or increased visibility within the broader food studies community.
- 5. Complementary to Other CAFS Initiatives:
  - Some responses mentioned that the CFS Journal works alongside other CAFS initiatives (like conferences and webinars) to create a comprehensive approach to sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration across the food studies field.

In summary, the CFS Journal is widely viewed as an essential part of CAFS, highly valued for its scholarly contribution, open access model, and its role in fostering academic and community engagement. There are also suggestions to continue growing its reach and impact within the broader food studies landscape.

## Feedback on Student Supports

1. Importance of Student Engagement:
  - Many responses highlighted the critical role of students in the CAFS community, with a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for networking, professional development, and community building. The annual conference was often mentioned as a key space for students to connect, learn, and grow.
2. Opportunities for Mentorship and Career Development:
  - There were suggestions for career forums and mentorship opportunities to help students navigate their academic and professional paths. Some responses also mentioned the need for career-oriented events such as workshops or webinars specifically tailored to students' needs, offering guidance on publishing, career planning, and job opportunities in the food studies field.
3. Dedicated Student Programs:
  - Several respondents advocated for student-focused initiatives like student groups, co-writing sessions, and working groups, similar to those in other associations. These programs could provide a sense of community and



academic support, particularly for students who may not have the bandwidth to take on more formal board roles or large commitments.

4. Workshops and Educational Resources:

- There was an emphasis on offering workshops or webinars for students that would focus on academic skills (e.g., research methodologies, publishing tips, pedagogy) and professional development. Some responses also suggested creating opportunities for skill-building in fields like ethnography or autoethnography, which are specific to food studies research.

5. Scholarships and Financial Support:

- A few responses suggested scholarships or funding opportunities for students, particularly for those studying food studies, an underrepresented field. This could help alleviate financial barriers to participation in CAFS events and support students in their academic journey.

In summary, supporting students was a central theme, with calls for networking opportunities, career development resources, student-focused initiatives, and financial support to help students succeed academically and professionally in food studies.

## Feedback on Online Events and Webinars

1. Accessibility and Inclusivity:

- Many responses emphasized the importance of online events and webinars as a way to make CAFS activities more accessible to a broader audience, particularly for those who are unable to attend in-person events due to geographical, financial, or other constraints. These virtual formats are seen as a way to democratize access to valuable content and opportunities for participation.

2. Expanding Reach:

- Several respondents noted that online events and webinars can help CAFS reach a larger, more diverse audience, including people from across Canada or even internationally. These formats allow people who might not be able to attend the annual conference or other events in person to stay engaged with the community.

3. Educational and Professional Development:

- Online workshops, webinars, and virtual meetings were mentioned as useful tools for academic and professional development, particularly for students and emerging scholars. These events could focus on areas such as research methods, publishing tips, pedagogical resources, or current issues in food studies, providing opportunities for learning outside of traditional conference settings.

4. Flexibility and Convenience:

- The convenience of online events, especially for people with busy schedules or those located in remote areas, was highlighted. Webinars and online meetings allow participants to engage without needing to travel, making it easier to participate regularly and stay up to date with the field.
5. Innovative Formats:
- Some responses suggested exploring novel formats for online engagement, such as podcast series, or creating online communities of practice. These could be combined with webinars to offer a more dynamic, multimedia approach to engaging CAFS members.

In summary, online events and webinars are seen as an essential tool for making CAFS more accessible, inclusive, and flexible, offering educational opportunities and professional development for a broader audience, particularly students and those unable to attend in person. The flexibility and ability to reach people across the country and beyond were key points of support for these digital formats.

## Feedback on Networking Events

1. Importance of Networking for Community Building:
  - Networking events, especially in-person gatherings, were viewed as crucial for building community within CAFS. Respondents emphasized that these events provide opportunities for members to connect, share ideas, collaborate on projects, and build professional relationships. The annual conference was frequently mentioned as a central event for networking.
2. Suggestions for More Networking Opportunities:
  - There was a desire for more local meet-ups or regional networking events outside of the main annual conference. These smaller gatherings could allow members from different parts of the country to engage without the need for travel, fostering a more connected and accessible community.
3. Student-Focused Networking:
  - Many responses pointed out the need for networking opportunities specifically for students. This could include dedicated sessions, mentorship programs, or special student gatherings that help emerging scholars connect with established professionals and peers in their field.
4. Collaborative and Cross-Disciplinary Networking:
  - Some responses suggested that networking events should be more inclusive of different disciplines and practitioners (e.g., community organizers, policy-makers). This would help bridge the gap between academics and those working in food systems on the ground, leading to richer conversations and collaborative opportunities.
5. Networking Beyond Conferences:

- There were also suggestions to create opportunities for networking that extend beyond the formal conference structure, such as informal social events, webinars, or working groups. These could help maintain connections throughout the year and provide more consistent opportunities for collaboration.

In summary, networking events were viewed as a key way to foster community, collaboration, and professional growth within CAFS. Respondents suggested more local, student-focused, and cross-disciplinary networking opportunities, both in-person and virtually, to ensure greater inclusivity and ongoing engagement beyond the main conference.