



INTERNATIONAL
DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION

BACKING INTERNATIONAL SMALL RESTAURANTS

2023 GRANT AWARDEE HIGHLIGHT

GUSHI JAPANESE STREET FOOD

TORONTO, CANADA

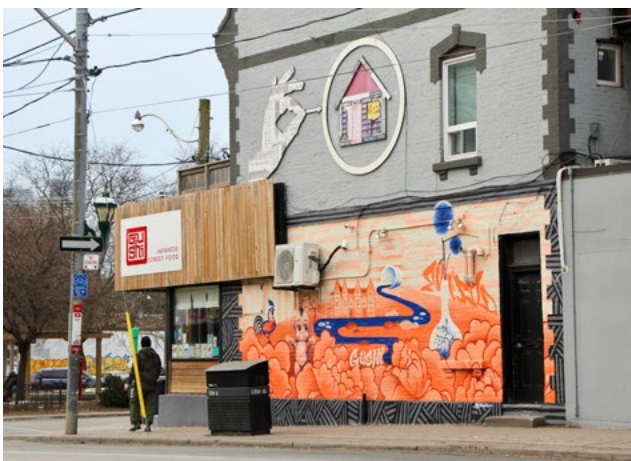
Before opening his first location in Canada in 2012, restaurant owner Shinji traveled all over Japan to experience the local food from Hokkaido to Kagoshima. Upon his move to Toronto, Shinji noticed a gap in the local dining scene. While sushi, tempura, and teriyaki abounded, he craved the taste of authentic Japanese fried chicken. Inspired to connect with his new community, he founded [Gushi](#) — a street food spot devoted to this specialty dish.

In business for over a decade, and now serving in two locations, Gushi has evolved with its surrounding community. Initially connecting with customers through a street side takeout window outfitted within a repurposed shipping container, Gushi has since expanded to include a larger space in Cabbagetown.

In 2023, Gushi was one of six restaurants in Toronto to be awarded a \$19,500 CAD through the “Backing International Small Restaurants” grant program. This recognition celebrated Gushi’s contribution to central Toronto’s food scene, and funded essential improvements needed to further enhance Gushi’s connection to its locale.

Grant money was used to paint a mural, envisioned in collaboration with a local artist to brighten the Cabbagetown restaurant exterior, blending Eastern and Western motifs while paying homage to the Don River Valley and the iconic bay and gable houses synonymous with the area’s heritage. The funds also facilitated expansion of indoor seating, creating a much-needed dining area and fostering a warm and welcoming space for experiencing the joy of Gushi’s Japanese food and culture.

“Local restaurants not only play a critical role in shaping Toronto’s rich food culture, but also help foster a sense of community and belonging,” says Kerri-Ann Santaguida, General Manager and Vice President of Merchant Services, American Express Canada.



Bright new mural blends Eastern and Western motifs



Expanded indoor dining area

“Backing International Small Restaurants” is an International Downtown Association Foundation grant program, supported by American Express, aimed at boosting business for small, independent restaurants that demonstrate a positive impact on their community, and are owned by individuals from underrepresented and/or economically vulnerable groups.