



# Western Canada – By the Numbers

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## Background

The Co-operative Innovation Project aimed to study rural and Aboriginal\* communities in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. This chapter provides a statistical snapshot of western Canada's rural and Aboriginal communities. While there is a great amount of statistical information available, we have presented information regarding factors which the Co-operative Innovation Project has identified as being the most relevant to co-operative development. Developing a co-operative business in rural and Aboriginal western Canada requires a combination of business capacity and social capacity; this snapshot will consider factors that may contribute to either or both.

To define and identify those communities, we used geographical boundaries outlined by Census Canada. We considered rural communities to be all census subdivisions (CSDs) outside of census metropolitan areas (CMAs, areas with core populations over 100,000) and census amalgamation areas (CAs, areas with core populations over 10,000). We also excluded areas where 30% or more of the population drives to work in either a CMA or CA, and that are not designated as Aboriginal by Statistics Canada. Aboriginal communities are those outside the CMAs and CAs that are designated as Aboriginal by Statistics Canada.

Although the data only allowed us to make the broad distinction discussed above, we recognize that there are all kinds of people living in all kinds of communities. In western Canada, for example, an average of almost 10% of the population of rural communities identify as Aboriginal.

Some of the data presented in this chapter, such as income and the value of housing, is expressed in dollar terms. It is important to note that all dollar figures presented are in current dollar (or nominal) amounts, i.e., they are expressed in terms of the prices that were in effect in the year in question (either 2006 or 2011). One of the consequences of using current dollar values is that some of the price or income increases might simply reflect the overall rise in prices (i.e., inflation) that occurred between 2006 and 2011. To give an idea of inflation during this five-year period, overall prices, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, rose by roughly 7.5% in British Columbia, 11.3% in Alberta, 11.2% in Saskatchewan, and 8.5% in Manitoba. If housing values, for instance, rose faster than these rates, then it can be concluded that housing prices rose faster than inflation. It could also be concluded that other factors besides those underlying basic inflation were at work in driving prices up.

A word is in order about the percentage change column. Regardless of the variable being considered, the percentage change column represents the increase or decrease in a given variable as a percentage of the original value of the variable. While this definition is straightforward in the

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\*The Co-operative Innovation Project uses the term "Aboriginal" to denote Canada's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. This usage reflects contemporary census and other documentation cited throughout the report. We honour and respect the identities of each of Canada's communities.



case where the variable is expressed as a number, it can be confusing when the variable is expressed as a percentage. To see this, consider an example where the variable is expressed as a percentage – a good example is the percentage of the population in a community that is Aboriginal. Suppose the population of a community is 200 people, with an Aboriginal population of 50. Thus, the percentage of the population that is Aboriginal is 25% (50 out of 200 people in total). If 10 Aboriginal people left and were replaced by 10 non-Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal population would then be 40 out of 200, or 20% of the total. The percentage change in this case is the change between 25 and 20, which is a 20% decrease in the Aboriginal population. Note that in this case the 20% change is also the change in the actual population – i.e., the change from 50 to 40. Taking the simple difference between the two percentages – e.g., 25% minus 20%, or 5% – does not represent the correct percentage change in the population and thus is not used. Additionally, please note that while the numbers displayed in the tables do not have decimal points in them, for accuracy the calculations of the percent change column were performed using the full number where they were available.

It is important to point out that there are known problems with the information collected in the 2011 National Household Survey. As a result of the way in which the survey was given, the numbers presented for 2011 may not be representative of the situation at the community level. As we aggregate the results across a broader scale, representativeness increases but may problems may still be present. These limitations must be considered when examining the data for 2011 and in comparing that data to the 2006 census.

In western Canada, there are more than 1,200 rural communities and almost 500 Aboriginal communities. They have a land area of over 2.3 million square kilometres. With less than one person for every square kilometre of land, these communities face unique pressures and have unique strengths compared to their urban counterparts. Distance is a factor. On average, residents of rural communities have to drive 131 kilometres to the nearest CA and 240 kilometres to the nearest CMA. Aboriginal communities, in contrast, have to drive an average of 310 kilometres to the nearest CA and 670 kilometres to the nearest CMA. Relying on services provided in central locations is not always realistic or desirable for these communities.

While each community has its own story to tell from its own numbers, and relates to the larger geographies in its own way, there is power in examining the data at aggregate levels. When data is examined from different perspectives it helps draw out different stories. Below we examine the data, differentiating by community type (rural or Aboriginal) at the western Canada level, and differentiating by province. We recognize that future comparative work, such as contrasting rural and Aboriginal western Canada to urban populations, would also help build an important perspective.

## Demographics

The demographics of a community have a significant impact on its ability to create co-operatives. The people that make up communities and how they interact affects their needs, their business capacity, and their social capacity.



For example, it could be assumed that young populations drive needs for education and daycare. Older populations drive needs for seniors' services. Or, having an older population may mean that a community is looking to support what youth they have, or a community with a younger population may value its few elders. Having many people of working age may increase business capacity in a community, and having individuals who have lived together for a long time may increase social capacity. The presence of recent immigrants may indicate a healthy economy in a community, but may also indicate changing needs.

Both strengths and challenges are inherent in most demographic information. Changes in any of these areas require communities to alter their services to meet the needs of their residents or find unique ways to meet those needs. Each community understands its demographics differently and can be more or less successful at leveraging strengths to overcome challenges.

### Western Canada

Over the course of the Co-operative Innovation Project, we heard two common stories: the population of rural Canada is disappearing, and young populations are driving growth in Aboriginal communities. In our study population, however, the story is somewhat different. The following discussion is an overview of the data presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1 Selected demographic variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011 – Part One.**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.
Total Population	1,480,000	1,510,000	176,000	196,000	2	11
Population (as a % of total)						
14 and under	18	17	33	31	-4	-5
15-24	12	11	18	17	-5	-1
25-44	27	26	31	31	-4	-2
45-64	27	29	14	16	6	15
65 and over	16	17	4	5	5	13
Median Age	42	42	23	24	0	7
Dependency Ratio	69	67	89	83	-3	-7
Language spoken at home (as a % of total population)						
English	84	85	57	63	1	11
French	2	3	<1	<1	50	0
Other (incl. Aboriginal)	13	12	41	36	-8	-12
Aboriginal Origins						
	9	9	98	98	6	0
Generation within community (as a % of total population)						
1st	9	9	1	0	-4	-49
2nd	21	17	1	1	-18	-30
3rd	70	74	98	98	6	1



Aboriginal communities continue to grow faster than their rural counterparts, but both types of communities saw increases in population between 2006 and 2011. While rural communities saw a population loss of 1% between 2001 and 2006, there was a 2% increase between 2006 and 2011, resulting in an overall population increase between 2001 and 2011. Aboriginal communities saw a 9% increase in population between 2001 and 2006, and an 11% increase between 2006 and 2011.

Young populations are holding relatively steady in both rural and Aboriginal communities, while the baby boom generation continues to age. The overall composition of population in Aboriginal communities is much younger than in rural communities, but individuals in both types of communities are getting older. Both rural and Aboriginal communities saw a growth in the proportion of their population in the 45-64 age group and in the 65-plus group. Both also saw a loss in the proportion of their population in the under-15 age group, with a larger loss in Aboriginal communities.

The median age, the age at which half the population is older and half the population is younger, stayed constant in the rural community population at age 42, and grew from 23 to 24 years in Aboriginal communities. Although Aboriginal communities are aging slightly faster than rural communities, overall, they are still much younger.

These changes may mean both Aboriginal and rural communities in western Canada will face increasing service requests (e.g., transportation for accessing goods and services) for their older populations, while still needing to address education, recreation, and infrastructure needs for families and younger people.

Another way to consider the impacts of demographics on co-operative development is to consider the pressure put on people in the working-age category. Since youth and seniors typically do not work, often have reduced access to resources, and may require greater service supports, a measure of the pressure placed on the working-age population can be found by looking at the number of “dependents” for every 100 potential “workers.” Specifically, the *dependency ratio* is the number of youth (0 to 19 years) and seniors (65 or older) relative to the number of people in the working-age population (20 to 64 years). In rural communities across western Canada, the dependency ratio has fallen by 2%, and in Aboriginal communities it has fallen by 6%. In other words, there are fewer people of working age to support dependents.

One measure of social capacity (although not the only one, by any means) is the degree of homogeneity in a community. Speaking a unified language may help increase social capacity. In rural communities, the percentage of households where English was spoken as a first language increased by 1%, to 85%, while the percentage of households where French was spoken as a first language increased from 2% to 3%. Somewhat troubling, Aboriginal communities saw a decrease of 5% in the percentage of people who spoke other languages besides English and French (this includes Aboriginal languages), while the use of English increased by almost the same amount. In Aboriginal communities, use of Indigenous language is often associated with healthier community



and cultural ties. It is unknown if this statistic is reflective of the problems with the 2011 National Household Survey or reflective of changing language patterns.

Communities with people who have lived together for generations may interact differently than communities that are changing quickly. Communities build their stories, identity, and norms of interaction over decades. Entrepreneurial drive, the willingness to try new ideas, and a reduced interest in the old ways of doing things may be associated with changing populations.

In Aboriginal communities, there is little in-migration and the majority of the population has lived in the community for three generations or more. In rural communities, the picture is somewhat different. By 2011, across western Canada, 74% of the population had lived in the community for three generations, 17% for two generations, and 9% were the first generation in the community. Rural communities, despite a continued influx of close to 10% new population, have enormous staying power into and past the third generation.

**Table 2 Selected demographic variables for western Canada by community type, 2006 and 2011 – Part Two.**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.
<b>Migration in the last year (as a % of total migration)</b>						
Non-Movers	87	89	90	92	2	3
From out of Country	4	3	1	0	-25	-100
From out of Province	13	11	6	4	-25	-35
From within Province	40	39	49	38	-3	-24
From within Community	43	50	44	58	16	33
<b>International immigrants by period of immigration (as a % of total immigrants)</b>						
Within the last 5 years	12	18	N/A	N/A	50	N/A
Within the last 6-10 years	8	9	N/A	N/A	13	N/A
Over 11 years ago	80	67	N/A	N/A	-16	N/A

Large numbers of citizens moving within and between communities can sometimes indicate reduced social capacity due to instability in living situations. In 2011, 89% of the rural population and 92% of the Aboriginal population did not change their place of residence (i.e., they were non-movers). These numbers reflect a 1.5% increase in rural communities and a 2% increase in Aboriginal communities. Of those who did move, at least half moved from one location to another within the community (50% in rural communities; 58% in Aboriginal communities). Staying within community makes it easier to maintain higher social capacity.



International immigration to rural communities in western Canada has risen to 18% of total immigrants in the last 5 years, an increase of 6% from 2006. As recent immigrants, these groups may require greater settlement services, and depending on their fit within their new community, the influx may result in cultural differences arising within communities. These changes can affect both community needs and social capacity. Immigration does not play a significant role in Aboriginal communities.

## The Provincial Perspective

Examining the same demographic information as in the previous section, but considering it from the provincial perspective, may allow us to see the information in a different way. The demographic story in each province differs. The following discussion is an overview of the data regarding rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3 Selected demographic variables for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011 – Part One**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
Total Population	439,000	446,000	550,000	570,000	360,000	376,000	302,000	314,000
Population (as a % of total)								
14 and under	16	15	21	20	20	19	22	21
15-44	38	36	43	41	38	37	40	39
45-64	31	32	24	26	25	27	23	25
65 and over	15	17	12	13	17	17	15	15
Median Age	44	46	37	38	41	42	38	39
Dependency Ratio	60	61	68	66	81	75	79	77
Language spoken at home (as % of total population)								
English	96	96	91	91	92	92	86	85
French	< 1	1	1	1	<1	<1	2	1
Other	2	1	7	7	7	6	12	12
Migration into the community in the last year								
Total #	37,000	21,000	46,000	26,000	35,000	20,000	16,000	10,000
As a % of the total population	9	6	9	6	10	9	6	4
Aboriginal Origins	12	15	14	18	21	30	29	37
Generation within community (as % of total population)								
1st	N/A	12	N/A	7	N/A	3	N/A	7
2nd	N/A	19	N/A	14	N/A	12	N/A	11
3rd	N/A	68	N/A	79	N/A	85	N/A	82

In Manitoba, the number of children aged 14 and under rose, though this percentage declined in all three of the other western provinces. In Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the population over age 65 remained steady, but grew in Alberta and BC. All provinces saw increases in the percentage of the population between 45 and 64, indicating a healthy working population. Alberta has the youngest median age, at 38, while British Columbia, which saw the largest change in population for its over-65 population, is oldest, with a median age of 46.



At a provincial level, there were reductions in the dependency ratios in Manitoba (-2%), Saskatchewan (-6%), and Alberta (-2%). These changes reflect the growth in the percentage of the population in the 45-64 age group. British Columbia, in contrast, saw an increase in its dependency ratio, in part because of the growth in the 65-plus age category.

British Columbia has the least linguistic diversity, with 96% of people in our rural and Aboriginal study communities speaking English as the main language at home. Manitoba has the most diversity, with 85% of people speaking English as a first language, and 13% speaking either French or another language. Manitoba has the highest concentration of French-speaking individuals in both rural and Aboriginal communities, although overall this number is in decline.

British Columbia had the highest percentage of first-generation community members (12%) and Saskatchewan had the lowest (3%). Among third-generation community members, British Columbia had the lowest percentage (68%) and Saskatchewan had the highest (85%). And while Alberta and Manitoba had similar first-generation numbers, Alberta had higher second-generation and lower third-generation numbers than Manitoba.

**Table 4 Selected demographic variables for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011 - Part Two**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
Migration in the last year (as a % of total migration)								
Non-movers	84	87	85	88	90	91	90	91
From out of Country	4	2	4	2	2	1	5	5
From out of Province	12	10	15	10	13	10	9	7
From within Province	41	36	39	36	43	33	41	35
From within Community	43	49	42	50	42	46	45	49
International immigrants by period of immigration (as a % of total immigrants)								
Within the last 5 years	7	8	14	21	11	38	22	30
Within the last 6-10 years	7	5	9	11	7	7	10	12
Over 10 years ago	86	83	75	61	80	27	67	47

In all four of the provinces, the percent of non-movers increased between 2006 and 2011 – in other words, people in rural and Aboriginal communities stayed put. In 2011, British Columbia experienced 13% migration, followed by Alberta at 12%, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba at 9%. The percent of migrants within the community (people moving from one residence to another, but staying within the community) increased between 2006 and 2011, reaching almost 50% in most provinces, except Saskatchewan which was slightly lower at 46%. The percent of migration to the study communities from within the province (from another community within the same province) decreased between 2006 and 2011 in all 4 provinces, most notably by 10% in Saskatchewan, but by only 3% in Alberta.



The percentage of migration coming from outside the country dropped between 2006 and 2011, except in Manitoba where the rate stayed at 5%. Although out-of-country migration makes up a small amount of the annual migration to our study communities, the percent of international immigrants that have arrived to the communities in the last 5 years has been increasing as a percent of all international immigrants. In Saskatchewan, this group increased by 27%, while in British Columbia it only increased by 1%. Manitoba and Alberta increased by 8% and 7% respectively.

## Education

Education levels, and diversity of educational experiences, are two of the factors that can impact business capacity. Although formal education is not the only indicator of business capacity, there are some business skills that require specialized knowledge. Additionally, increased diversity of skills and knowledge within a community may increase a community's ability to successfully develop co-operatives to meet its unique needs. The more diverse a community's knowledge, the better prepared it may be to provide its own services from within its population. That being said, we recognize that formal education is only one indicator of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**Table 5 Selected education variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change		
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.	
<b>Achievement (% of population 15 and over)</b>							
No certificate, diploma, degree	37	26	67	61	-29	-9	
High school diploma	25	28	13	13	13	36	
Apprenticeship or trade, college or other non-university	27	31	14	16	18	15	
University certificate, diploma, bachelors degree	9	11	5	4	22	-9	
University above bachelor's	2	3	1	1	31	-27	
<b>Major (% of population 15 and over)</b>							
No post-secondary Education	N/A	55	N/A	80	N/A	N/A	
Arts, communications technology, humanities	N/A	5	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	
Social/behaviour sciences, law	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	
Business, public administration	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	
Physical, life sciences, technology, agriculture, natural resources, conservation	N/A	8	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	
Math, computer, information sciences, architecture, engineering, related technology	N/A	3	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	
Health	N/A	13	N/A	6	N/A	N/A	
Personal protection and transportation	N/A	8	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	
	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	



## Western Canada

The following discussion is an overview of the data presented in Table 5.

While the percentage of people with less than a high school education is still large (26% in rural communities and 61% in Aboriginal), there have been significant gains in this category. Aboriginal communities increased the number of people with at least a high school diploma by 36% over the 5 years between 2006 and 2011.

Rural communities saw gains in the percentage of the population that had achieved apprenticeship or university attainment, while Aboriginal communities saw gains in apprenticeship but a decline in university attainment. Because the overall Aboriginal population increased significantly, the overall percentage of people with degrees or diplomas declined.

A notable difference between rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, one that is linked to the higher rates of postsecondary attainment in rural communities, is the proportion of the population with specific skills. In rural communities, the percentage of the population with business training is 4% higher than in Aboriginal communities. For technological skills (physical and life sciences, and math and computers), 16% of the rural working population has such training, while only 6% of the population in Aboriginal communities indicate these skills. In health, rural communities have 5% higher, and in education, 2% higher number of people with such skills compared to Aboriginal communities.

During the CIP community meetings, health and education were listed as important needs in Aboriginal communities. With fewer people in the communities trained to provide these services, not only is the intensity of need likely to be greater, the ability to meet that need may be reduced.

## The Provincial Perspective

When examining the data from a provincial perspective, we see some apparent differences between the provinces.



**Table 6 Selected education variables for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
Achievement (% of population 15 and over)								
No certificate, diploma, degree	29	22	40	30	44	36	49	41
High school diploma	27	28	24	27	23	27	21	24
Apprenticeship or college	29	32	27	32	23	26	23	23
University	11	13	8	9	9	9	9	9
University above bachelor's	4	5	2	2	1	1	2	2
Major (% of population 15 and over)								
No post-secondary	N/A	50	N/A	56	N/A	62	N/A	65
Education	N/A	5	N/A	4	N/A	5	N/A	5
Arts, communications technology, humanities	N/A	4	N/A	2	N/A	<1	N/A	2
Social/behaviour sciences, law	N/A	4	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	2
Business, public administration	N/A	8	N/A	7	N/A	6	N/A	6
Life sciences; agriculture	N/A	4	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	2
Math, computers & engineering	N/A	14	N/A	14	N/A	9	N/A	8
Health	N/A	8	N/A	7	N/A	6	N/A	7
Personal protection and transportation	N/A	4	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	2

\*Note: Life sciences: physical, life sciences, technology, agriculture, natural resources, conservation; Math and engineering: math, computer, information sciences, architecture, engineering, related technology; Apprenticeship or college: apprenticeship or trade, college or other non-university.

At a provincial level, all provinces saw improvement: fewer people between 2006 and 2011 reported less than high school education. Manitoba has the highest percentage of the population with less than a high school education at 41%, while British Columbia has the lowest at 22%. Alberta had the greatest reduction in this category between 2006 and 2011, a change of 10%.

British Columbia had the highest percentage of the population holding a university degree above the bachelor's level (5%) and Saskatchewan had the lowest (1%). Apprenticeship rose across rural and Aboriginal communities across the western provinces.

In terms of the diversity of post-secondary training, Saskatchewan has the least concentration in any one area, but has less of a percentage of people trained in social/behaviour sciences and law than the other provinces. Alberta and British Columbia both have a somewhat higher percentage of individuals with math, computers and engineering training. British Columbia also has a higher percentage than the other provinces with arts, communications technology and humanities training.

## Housing

Housing is a basic need. Without housing, it is difficult if not impossible to focus on building the community in an entrepreneurial or social manner. Housing came up as a top need in almost every community meeting, and was a top need in both of our surveys. Respondents identified many types of needed housing: rental housing, seniors' housing, and affordable housing are just a few. At the



same time, if there is too much vacant housing in a community, it may be indicative of a community in distress, either due to depopulation or poor housing conditions.

### Western Canada

Table 7 presents data on housing in Aboriginal and rural communities in western Canada. Over the period 2006-2011, there was little change in the make-up of owned and rented housing. Aboriginal communities seem to have transitioned some rental accommodations to band-owned housing. Vacancy rates have remained constant.

**Table 7 Housing variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.
<b>Dwellings (as a % of total dwellings)</b>						
Owned	80	79	22	22	-1	0
Rented	20	20	11	8	8	-27
Band Owned	1	1	68	70	0	3
Average value of dwellings	\$181,000	\$275,000	N/A	N/A	52	N/A
Vacancy Rate (%)	17	18	11	12	6	9
<b>Spending over 30% of income on shelter (% of population)</b>						
Renters	22	24	N/A	N/A	9	N/A
Owners	11	11	N/A	N/A	0	N/A

The average value of the dwellings in rural communities increased by 52% in the period between 2006 and 2011 (recall that the values are in nominal terms). Only 22 percent of residents in Aboriginal communities own their own homes, while an increasing number live in band-owned dwellings. The number of owners spending more than 30% of their income on housing did not change over the period, although the number of renters doing so increased by 9%.

### The Provincial Perspective

Table 8 presents the same data as the previous section, analyzed by province. There was little change in the distribution of owned and rented dwellings between 2006 and 2011. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan there was an increase in band-owned dwellings, and a similar decrease in individually-owned dwellings. We have not examined if this is reflective of issues with the 2011 National Household Survey, or due to other factors.

British Columbia had the smallest increase in the average dwelling value at 28% between 2006 and 2011. Alberta and Manitoba both saw values increase by 55%. Saskatchewan housing values increased by 100% during the 2006-2011 period (recalling these are nominal values). Manitoba (\$172,000) and Saskatchewan (\$176,000) were below the western average, while Alberta (\$293,000), and British Columbia (\$351,000) were above.



**Table 8 Selected housing variables for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
Dwellings (as a % of total dwellings)								
Owned	78	78	77	76	76	70	72	67
Rented	21	20	20	20	17	16	19	18
Band Owned	1	2	3	5	7	12	10	15
Average value of dwellings(\$)	275,000	351,000	189,000	293,000	88,000	176,000	110,000	172,000
Vacancy Rate (%)	20	23	10	12	18	17	20	19
Spending over 30% of income on shelter (% of population)								
Renters	39	41	29	32	28	29	28	28
Owners	17	17	14	16	11	9	11	11

Vacancy rates increased slightly in British Columbia and Alberta, and decreased slightly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Alberta has the lowest vacancy rates at 12%, and British Columbia the highest, at 23%.

The percent of house owners spending more than 30% of their income on shelter increased in Alberta, decreased in Saskatchewan and stayed the same in Manitoba and British Columbia. Saskatchewan has the fewest owners in this category (9%), and British Columbia the greatest (17%). However, in all provinces except Manitoba, the number of renters who spent more than 30% of their income on rent, increased. The increasing costs of renting shelter are being felt most keenly in British Columbia, where 41% of renters spent more than 30% of their total income securing a place to live. This number is lowest in Manitoba, at 28%. It is clear that renting, rather than owning shelter, takes an economic toll in rural and Aboriginal western Canada.

## Income

The income that individuals have access to directly affects their ability to support business through purchases or investment, or to donate to community initiatives. How people attain their income provides insights into the amount of time spent working, the wealth of a community, and possible constraints on time to focus on volunteer initiatives.

## Western Canada

Table 9 presents data on income in rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada (all figures in nominal terms).



**Table 9 Selected income variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	Rural	Aboriginal
<b>Median individual after tax income</b>		
2005	\$22,000	\$9,000
2010	\$28,000	\$11,000
<b>Income Composition (as a % of total income)</b>		
Wages & salaries	64	62
Self employment	7	< 1
Investment income	6	< 1
Pensions, superannuation, annuities	6	1
Other market income	2	1
Canada/Quebec Pension benefits	5	2
CPP, old age pension, guaranteed income supplement	5	6
Employment insurance benefits	2	3
Child benefits	2	16
Other government, including social assistance	2	8

Both Aboriginal and rural communities have seen an increase in their after-tax income over the 2006-2011 period. Individuals in Aboriginal communities earn far less than their rural counterparts, a result that is somewhat consistent with the lower levels of education in Aboriginal communities. Since the proportion of wages to income is roughly the same between the two types of communities, it would appear that people in Aboriginal communities are working fewer hours, have lower wages, or both.

Self-employment makes up a sizable proportion of income in rural communities (7%); in Aboriginal communities, self-employment income is almost nonexistent. However, it was clear during the community meetings that individuals in Aboriginal communities have high levels of entrepreneurship, shown through a robust informal economy, although this informal experience may not translate into formal income. Co-operative development requires an entrepreneurial spirit, as well as a willingness to act on opportunities.

Rural residents earn a greater proportion of their income from investments, pensions, and other market income than do residents in Aboriginal communities. Due to their lower wage income, Aboriginal community residents do not have the same opportunity to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan, which means lower payments in old age and more reliance on things like Old Age Pension and the guaranteed income supplement.

Aboriginal communities derive a much higher percentage of their income from child payments and other forms of government assistance compared to their rural counterparts. At a community level, fewer sources of income mean a greater risk should one income source dry up. As well, a higher reliance on government payments means there is less opportunity to increase earnings to invest in other business opportunities, including co-operative development.



## The Provincial Perspective

As shown in Table 10, all four provinces saw an increase in their after-tax income between 2005 and 2010; Alberta and Saskatchewan had the greatest increases. Alberta is the only province which has a higher median income (\$29,000), and a higher percentage of income from wages and salaries (71%) than our study communities. Saskatchewan has the highest income from self employment (7%), British Columbia the highest from pensions (8%), and Manitoba the highest in child benefits (8%).

**Table 10 Selected income variables for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
Median individual after tax income				
2005	22,000	23,000	18,000	18,000
2010	26,000	29,000	24,000	21,000
Income Composition (as a % of total income)				
Wages and salaries	64	71	60	62
Self employment	3	3	7	5
Investment income	4	5	6	3
Pensions, superannuation, annuities	8	3	4	5
Other market income	2	1	2	1
Canada/Quebec Pension benefits	N/A	3	4	4
CPP, old age pension, guaranteed income supplement	5	4	5	6
Employment insurance benefits	2	2	2	2
Child benefits	3	5	6	8
Other government, including social assistance	4	3	4	4

## Labour Activity

How much time people spend working, and what type of work they do, affects both their availability for co-operative development and the skill sets they bring to the process. If most of the people in a community are engaged in paid employment, they may have less time available for volunteer work. People who are self-employed bring valuable skill sets to development processes. High numbers of unemployed people indicate untapped labour pools that may be available to support new endeavours.

## Western Canada

Table 11 presents data on labour activity in western Canada by community type.



**Table 11 Selected labour variables in western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.
Participation rate (%)	68	67	48	44	-2	-8
Employment rate (%)	95	94	73	74	-1	2
Unemployment rate (%)	5	6	27	26	22	-4
Self-employed (%)	24	18	3	2	-25	-33
Occupations (as a % of all occupations)						
Business, finance and administration	12	12	11	11	1	0
Art, culture, recreation, sport	2	2	2	1	-10	-60
Education, law, social service	6	10	15	24	62	61
Management	8	15	7	7	91	6
Manufacturing and utilities	4	4	4	2	-3	-41
Natural and applied sciences	3	4	2	1	16	-32
Natural resources, agriculture	18	7	10	7	-63	-26
Sales and service	21	20	28	22	-5	-21
Trades, transport and equipment operators	20	21	20	22	4	12
Other	1	1	12	13	10	11

The participation rate shows the percentage of the population that are either working or looking for work. Both rural and Aboriginal communities saw a decrease in the participation rate over the period 2006 to 2011, with Aboriginal communities reporting an overall 8% decrease. Fewer people in Aboriginal communities were working or looking for work. There was a slight increase in the unemployment rate in rural communities during this time (in 2011, the unemployment rate sat at 6%). The unemployment rate in Aboriginal communities remained high, at 26%, but was a decrease from 2006.

It is interesting to compare unemployment rates and the percentage of income from Employment Insurance (see Table 9 Selected income variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011). For a variety of reasons that have to do with the duration of work when it is available and the length of unemployment periods, the percentage of income from Employment Insurance is less than the unemployment rate. In rural communities in 2011, Employment Insurance accounted for 2% of income, while 6% of individuals were unemployed. In Aboriginal communities, Employment Insurance makes up 3% of income, but 26% of individuals were unemployed. This differential coverage indicates that the period and intensity of unemployment for individuals in Aboriginal communities are greater than for their rural counterparts, and that periods of work may be insufficient to qualify for Employment Insurance.

The rate of self-employment in both rural and Aboriginal communities fell considerably between 2006 and 2011, a 25% drop in rural communities and a 33% drop in Aboriginal communities. More analysis is required to determine the reasons for this drop. The rates of self-employment in Aboriginal communities is considerably less than that in rural communities.



The types of work that people are involved in is reflective of their education, the opportunities available near their community, and the needs of the larger economy. Rural communities saw a significant decrease in the percentage of people working in natural resources and agriculture, but an increase in the percentage of the workforce working in both management and education. In Aboriginal communities, there was a substantial decrease in the percentage of those working in the service industry and in the natural resources/agriculture area, while the percentage of those working in education/social services increased significantly. By combining the information on occupations with the types of needs that communities identify, it is possible to determine if there are people skilled in the areas in which gaps were identified.

## The Provincial Perspective

As can be seen in Table 12, the labour participation rate in all four provinces saw a slight decrease, which could be attributed to the aging population with people entering retirement. The unemployment rate had a slight increase in all four provinces at the same time, and self-employment declined slightly. There are many factors which could play a part in these numbers, but the two largest factors generally include the age of the population, and changes in the economy.

**Table 12 Selected labour variables for rural and Aboriginal western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
Participation rate (%)	64	61	72	70	66	61	62	60
Employment rate (%)	92	90	95	94	94	93	93	91
Unemployment rate (%)	8	10	5	6	6	7	7	8
Self-employed (%)	19	16	22	17	28	20	21	14
Occupations (as a % of all occupations)								
Business, finance and administration	12	12	13	13	11	11	12	11
Art, culture, recreation, sport	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Education, law, social service	7	11	6	10	7	11	8	15
Health occupations	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	7
Management	9	11	8	14	6	21	7	14
Manufacturing and utilities	6	5	4	4	3	2	4	4
Natural and applied sciences	5	5	3	3	2	1	2	3
Natural resources, agriculture	9	6	18	7	28	8	19	6
Sales and service	24	22	21	19	19	20	23	21
Trades, transport and equipment operators	21	20	22	23	17	19	17	18
Other	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	3

Where – or more specifically, *which* occupations – people are working in has changed slightly as well. All four provinces saw an increase in the percentage of people working in education, law, social service and management. There were very large decreases in natural resources and agriculture, and a slight decrease in sales and service. Both Alberta and Saskatchewan had a large increase in the percent of management occupations, and a large decrease in natural resources/agriculture. It may be possible that some jobs previously coded in natural resources/agriculture are now being coded under management. Trades, transport and equipment



operators, and sales and service make up the largest proportion of the occupations in all four provinces.

## Business

The size and type of businesses in a community affect both the scope of skills and the availability of local industry to support new initiatives. Opportunities to partner with existing industry, utilize existing skill sets, and use the infrastructure already in place, can help support co-operative development. Diverse businesses operating in a community provide a variety of solutions to common problems in terms of economies of scale, shared services and shared supply, transportation, and access to skilled workers.

## Western Canada

In most rural and Aboriginal communities, most people are employed at small businesses. Owners and employees of small businesses tend to be less specialized and have wider skillsets to manage the multiple requirements of running a business. Since most co-operative development is in smaller-sized enterprises, the expertise necessary to run these enterprises may often be present in the community.

**Table 13 Business variables for western Canada, by community type, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	Rural		Aboriginal		% Change	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	Rural	Abor.
<b>Business Size (as a % of all businesses)</b>						
Small (up to 49 employees)	99	99	97	95	0	-2
Medium (50 to 99 employees)	1	1	2	3	0	50
Large (100 + employees)	1	< 1	1	2	< -1	100
<b>Business Type (as a % of all businesses)</b>						
Accommodation, food service	4	4	5	5	-1	4
Admin. & support, waste mgmt. & remediation services	3	3	2	3	3	48
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting	38	34	30	26	-9	-26
Construction	9	10	9	11	16	20
Educational services	1	1	2	1	-2	-51
Entertainment & recreation	1	1	2	2	-8	1
Finance and insurance	2	3	1	2	18	58
Health care, social assistance	2	3	6	5	18	-19
Information and culture	1	1	< 1	1	0	103
Management of companies	2	2	2	2	45	51
Manufacturing	2	2	2	2	-13	3
Mining, oil and gas	3	3	1	3	10	113
Professional, scientific, technical services	5	6	3	4	6	39
Public administration	1	1	6	5	0	-19
Real estate, rental and leasing	4	5	3	4	21	54
Retail	7	7	12	10	-6	-16
Transportation and warehousing	6	6	6	6	-6	-6
Wholesale trade	3	2	2	2	-10	0



Between 2006 and 2011, rural and Aboriginal communities saw a reduction in the percentage of businesses focused on agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; the decrease in Aboriginal communities was 26%. Aboriginal communities shifted towards construction and mining, with some increases in cultural and information businesses, finance, real estate and leasing, and professional roles. Rural communities shifted towards management, real estate, finance, health and construction. Agriculture still makes up the largest percent of businesses in both community types. Aboriginal communities have a greater percentage of businesses focused on health care/social assistance, public administration and retail than rural communities. Rural communities have a higher percentage of businesses in professional services and a greater percentage of agricultural businesses.

## The Provincial Perspective

At the provincial level, the strong prevalence of small business in rural and Aboriginal communities is clear. 99% of all businesses in these areas employ fewer than 50 individuals.

**Table 14 Selected business variables in rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, by province, 2006 and 2011**

Variable	British Columbia		Alberta		Saskatchewan		Manitoba	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
<b>Business Size (as a % of all businesses)</b>								
Small (up to 50 employees)	98	98	99	99	99	99	99	99
Medium (50 to 100 employees)	1	1	1	1	<1	<1	1	1
Large (101 + employees)	1	1	1	1	<1	<1	1	1
<b>Business Type (as a % of all businesses)</b>								
Accommodation, food service	7	8	3	3	3	3	4	3
Admin./support/waste mgmt./remed. services	4	4	3	3	1	1	2	2
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting	14	12	32	29	58	54	47	43
Construction	14	15	10	12	4	6	7	9
Educational services	1	1	1	1	<1	<1	1	1
Entertainment and recreation	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	1
Finance and insurance	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3
Health care, social assistance	4	4	2	3	2	2	3	4
Information and culture	1	1	1	1	<1	<1	1	1
Management of companies	2	2	1	2	2	3	1	2
Manufacturing	4	3	2	2	2	1	3	2
Mining, oil and gas	1	1	5	6	2	2	<1	1
Professional, scientific, technical services	8	8	7	7	2	3	3	3
Public administration	1	1	<1	<1	2	2	1	1
Real estate, rental and leasing	8	9	4	5	2	3	3	4
Retail	10	9	6	6	5	5	8	7
Transportation and warehousing	6	5	8	7	4	4	5	5
Utilities	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Wholesale trade	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3

The percent of businesses in agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting has been decreasing in all four provinces. In Saskatchewan, however, these businesses still make up 54% of the businesses in rural and Aboriginal communities, Manitoba 43%, Alberta 29%, and in British Columbia this category is



the smallest, at 12%. Given that few concentrations of business make up more than 10% of any total business type, this category is still important in British Columbia despite how much lower it is than the other provinces.

Increases in businesses have been in construction. British Columbia (15%) has the highest percentage in this category, and Saskatchewan (6%) the lowest, though all provinces are increasing. Real estate/rental/leasing has also increased in all four provinces. Alberta (6%) has a higher percentage of businesses in mining/oil/gas, while the other provinces have 1% or 2%.

## Conclusion

Taking a closer look at statistics on the communities in rural and Aboriginal western Canada help us to better understand what these communities look like, how they compare to each other, and how they compare across provincial boundaries. How statistics are compiled and compared make a difference in terms of what patterns appear. For the Co-operative Innovation Project, mandated with studying rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada, statistics gave us a head start in focusing on our study communities and drawing out some overall pictures.

When we broke apart western Canada to look at rural and Aboriginal communities, some interesting points arose. While Aboriginal communities continued to grow faster than their rural counterparts, there were some surprises. Rural communities also grew, a finding contrary to contemporary expectations. While Aboriginal communities remain much younger than rural communities, both rural and Aboriginal communities are, overall, aging.

Rural communities are becoming increasingly diverse, with increased international migration. Aboriginal communities experience little in-migration, and a substantially stable population over time, where few people move in or out. Linguistic diversity is highest in Manitoba and lowest in British Columbia's rural and Aboriginal communities, even though BC showed a higher percentage of people who had just moved into the community.

Education remains an important indicator of rural and Aboriginal community strength. In both rural and Aboriginal western Canada, a high proportion of people (26% in rural communities and 61% in Aboriginal communities) do not hold a high school diploma. However, all provinces noted significant gains in this statistic between 2006 and 2011, particularly in Aboriginal communities. Both rural and Aboriginal communities saw an increase in the percentage of people with apprenticeship or other training.

Housing was a major concern for rural and Aboriginal residents across western Canada according to CIP surveys and community visits. One important indicator was that western Canadian rural residents who rent their shelter appear to be spending an increasing amount of their overall income on this one item, while ownership spending had not changed. This suggests that wealth is accumulating in the hands of owners, while renters are falling further behind. This jump was particularly noticeable in Alberta, with BC and Saskatchewan just behind.



Income is another indicator of the social and business capacity of rural and Aboriginal community members. As expected, there is a significant gap between rural and Aboriginal communities. Some of the more interesting statistics point to the importance of self-employment income in rural communities, and the importance of child benefit income and other government income in Aboriginal communities. Investment and pension income was an important source in rural communities, reflecting an older population demographic who may be retired and have time to put into volunteering or other community pursuits. Employment insurance was a more important source of income for Aboriginal communities, although there remains a large gap between those collecting employment insurance and those who are unemployed in Aboriginal communities.

In terms of occupations, statistics for rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada show an overall decline in the number of jobs in agriculture and natural resources, and a decline in the number of sales and service jobs found in Aboriginal communities. Overall, there has been a rise in the number of people working in areas such as education, law, social services and management. However, across rural and Aboriginal western Canada, the majority of occupations fall in the trades, transport, equipment, and service industries. Interestingly, almost all jobs in rural and Aboriginal western Canada can be found in small businesses with fewer than 50 employees, and the majority of these businesses operate in agriculture, forestry, and construction.

Statistics, however, do not tell us why we see changes, similarities or differences. Comparing to other communities, or to a larger picture can help people to understand the strengths of their community and how their community fits into the larger picture. However, numbers are only part of the story. Each community sees itself differently and chooses to leverage its strengths in a unique way. Considering the role of co-operatives to meet needs in a community, or identifying solutions that suit needs on-the-ground in a particular community requires a community to look hard and critically at itself, and work together to build a path forward.