



# Co-operative Development in Western Canada

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\* Reference: Co-operative Innovation Project (January 2016), *Co-operative Development in Western Canada*. Part of Co-operative Innovation Project Final Report. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan.



## Introduction and Aims

The Canadian co-operative community can be found across Canada, from sector apex associations and national lobby groups to small co-operatives working to spread co-operative ideas.

At the federal level, the newly created Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada (CMC) is a third-tier co-operative that combines French and English-speaking federations, associations, large co-operative businesses, and research groups across Canada. It has a diverse range of activity and interests, which include government relations (primarily at the federal level), education, member engagement, communications, research, and co-operative development. CMC is a member of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and works to connect Canada's co-operative community with its international counterparts. This international connection by a third-tier co-op brings much of the Canadian co-op community at the local level into direct connection to the international association.

CMC works in close concert with provincial co-operative apex associations from Newfoundland to British Columbia. These provincial organizations are, in turn, often directly responsible for co-operative development in their province, particularly in advocating for co-operative interests at the policy level, in direct co-op development help to new and struggling co-ops, and in promoting co-operatives in general. In addition, several large co-operatives (such as The Co-operators and Arctic Co-operatives Limited) operate internal co-operative development arms with different functions, focuses, and programs.

The Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP) was given the task of looking at co-operative development in rural and Aboriginal<sup>†</sup> communities in western Canada. The main question was: What co-operative development activities and supports are in place from Manitoba to British Columbia, particularly through associations or ministries with co-operative development roles? The secondary question was: Are those methods consistent with the CIP model of co-operative development, designed for rural and Aboriginal communities? Are there gaps or opportunities that should be considered?

It can be difficult to separate co-operative development activities aimed at helping a group form a more robust co-operative enterprise from activities that aim to grow and strengthen the larger co-operative environment. As a result, the following chapter provides a broad overview and high-level comparison of a number of activities beyond the step-by-step process of co-operative development with one group.

## Methodology

This chapter draws first on the information provided via website by each of the associations listed below. These websites are the “window” into co-operative development from the public perspective.<sup>1</sup> If a group is looking for help to develop a co-operative enterprise, or would like more information on co-ops in general, these websites often operate as an important initial point of contact.

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<sup>†</sup> 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 which provide source citations throughout this project. We honour and respect the identities of each of Canada’s communities.



The information provided on each website is supplemented by two additional sources for the purpose of our analysis. The Co-operative Innovation Project conducted a series of interviews with co-operative developers from each of the four provincial apex associations. During the interviews, the co-op developers shared their knowledge of the structure and goals of their respective associations through the lens of developing new co-operatives. These interviews were transcribed, producing more than 400 pages of transcript. The transcripts were analyzed using NVivo, a computer program designed to help researchers analyze rich qualitative data sources. In addition, each of the provincial associations has conducted self-reflection analyses or have developed white papers or other public and non-public documentation. These were generously shared with CIP and have been analyzed along with the interviews and public websites. For reasons of space, this chapter includes limited primary documentation (such as website screenshot captures or interview transcripts).

The framework of analysis is the CIP definition of co-operative development. A critical part of that framework is the Plunkett Foundation's four stages of co-operative development (*Inspire, Explore, Create, Thrive*), which provide direction and analytical strength to our view of current co-operative development practices in western Canada.

This chapter focuses primarily on the activities of the four provincial apex associations, as a way to cross-analyze associations that have similar histories and purposes. However, CIP recognizes that there are many more groups than those listed below that both promote co-operatives and the larger co-operative environment, and directly support the development of individual co-operatives.



## Manitoba

In Manitoba, three groups have a direct co-operative development mandate. The first is the Manitoba Co-operative Association (MCA), which is a provincial apex group drawing its membership and support from provincial and national co-operatives and credit unions. The second is the Government of Manitoba, which continues to fund and support co-operative development through its Co-operative Development Services (CDS) branch of the Department of Housing and Community Development. Both groups work closely with the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (CDEM), which works directly with bilingual communities on a host of community economic development projects, including co-operative enterprises.

### Manitoba Co-operative Association

MCA is a provincial organization made up of 11 member companies that together represent about 150 co-ops. In such a configuration, small, emerging, or other co-ops are members of the provincial association only if they have membership in one of the 11 member organizations. Created by the co-operative associations (such as Credit Union Central of Manitoba, Arctic Co-operatives Limited, and Federated Co-operatives Limited),<sup>2</sup> MCA's ongoing task is "to enhance and support the development of a united, growing and influential cooperative movement in Manitoba."<sup>3</sup>

Mission: "On behalf of its members, MCA serves the common and individual needs of cooperatives in the areas of development, education, youth leadership, government relations and global awareness. MCA fulfills its mission by:

- helping groups form cooperatives, supporting the growth and success of cooperatives, promoting opportunities for co-operation among cooperatives and by recognizing cooperative achievement
- providing forums for the flow of knowledge and information among cooperative leaders
- offering leadership programs that help youth become active and knowledgeable cooperative members
- assisting member organizations in relations with the Government of Manitoba and with the development of public policy
- supporting programs that help members and the public learn more about the cooperative movement and the benefits of membership, and
- working in partnership with the Canadian Cooperative Association and others to promote the cooperative movement's development in Manitoba, Canada and throughout the world providing co-op development services"<sup>4</sup>

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- Conducts its own research on the Manitoba co-operative community, including surveys of Manitobans re: their knowledge of and connections to co-operatives
- Has a phased-in plan for growth, which is publicly available; working on a second phase
- Website has an on-line library of resources



- Connects to and supports postsecondary research and training on co-operatives through the University of Winnipeg Chair in Co-operative Enterprises
- Has an awards program to reward co-operative effort and success
- Newsletters available and easy to access
- Promotes youth co-operative education through curricula and leadership training
- Runs a youth co-operative experiential program supporting high school students to put together and operate a co-operative; examples include high school credit unions, operated in conjunction with a community credit union partner, or an Aboriginal artist co-op in a Winnipeg high school
  - Aboriginal youth have been a particular area of focus and success, through the artist co-operative at Children of the Earth High School
- Works closely with co-operative developers employed by the provincial government; also works closely with other groups (such as CDEM or Supporting Employment and Economic Development [SEED Winnipeg]) to develop cohesive strategies for social and economic development using the co-operative model when appropriate
- Hosts the Tax Credit Fund, which has garnered financial support from a variety of co-ops in the province
  - Part of this fund has been and can be used for co-operative development activities, including speaking and meeting with groups interested in the co-operative model, helping them define and target their business, and working to guide the group toward incorporation
    - A significant drawback is that *only co-ops and credit unions* listed as such in Manitoba's directory can contribute to the fund and gain the tax credit. No other businesses, enterprises, or private individuals have access to that fund, even if they agree with the principles of co-operative development
    - The fund is capped at \$200,000.00 per year, but has yet to reach that goal
    - There is a distinct provincial ethos that current co-operatives should fund co-op development, which is why the province created the Tax Credit Fund

## Weaknesses

- Limited ability to source operation funding through MCA's structure; with only 11 member organizations, the MCA must constantly return to the same pool to receive its operating mandate
- Structure deliberately hampers wider and broader connections with the larger co-operative community; connecting to grassroots co-operatives is an ongoing challenge
- Staff information, email, or other contact information not available; provides only a general email to the main office
- Social media use is limited



- Staff have multiple and/or limited roles, which reduces their ability to engage in active co-op development
- Little to no budget for community meetings, or flying to remote locations, such as would be required for co-operative development work in rural, remote, or Aboriginal communities
- Co-operative development is response-driven, not actively initiated
- Some confusion and crossover between provincial government co-op development employees and the work of the MCA
- Has not created separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development, although these are in development and are receiving energy and support

### Government of Manitoba: Co-operative Development Services

Manitoba employs co-op developers at Winnipeg, Brandon, and Portage la Prairie. Rural offices in Churchill, Dauphin, The Pas, Roblin, Selkirk, Swan River, Thompson, and many others, including several offices within Winnipeg and feeder offices in a number of rural and larger centres, also feed into the co-operative development services team. If a person or group contacts one of these offices, either in person or through other means, there is a large team in place to refer them.

#### *Analysis*

##### **Strengths**

- Manitoba government views co-operatives as a feasible business framework and a good fit for communities and groups interested not only in business, but also in social models and reasons for development
- Provincial government co-operative development in Manitoba remains highly leveraged and resourced, with co-operative developers on staff
- MCA and provincial developers are in close contact and work together when possible, sharing information and support
- Provincially employed co-op developers can link emerging co-operative business groups with business development services, including people who can help them write business plans and articles of incorporation, or deal with other technical details
- Direct community engagement through extension; the branch system reaches deeper into rural and northern Manitoba
- Focuses on the technical and business challenges

##### **Weaknesses**

- Does not appear to engage in active, community-based co-operative development through holding open community meetings (there was no information on this potential role or responsibility for doing such activities on the website)
- Limited emphasis on social cohesion and group development as a critical piece of the co-operative development process



- No emphasis on co-operatives as a movement, the social importance of co-operatives, or of marketing or advocating for the co-operative model
- “Aftercare” is restricted to hiring staff and opening the doors of the business; no reference to co-op-to-co-op connectivity, membership energizing, or long-term viability
- Does not act as a connector between co-ops
- Unknown how it promotes sector advocacy from within the government
- No separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development

## Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities

Since 1996, CDEM has been working with Manitoba’s bilingual communities to promote economic development based on bilingual principles.

### **CDEM’s Mandate**

- Identify the Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities Association’s global vision for economic development
- Facilitate and articulate economic planning for the territory of those municipalities that are a member of the Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities Association
- Co-operate with local leadership in order to identify the potential for each region
- Co-operate with local leadership in order to carry out concrete economic development projects
- Support the communities, the individuals, or the groups in the implementation of specific projects, especially by co-ordinating the studies required to verify their potential and feasibility
- Provide to the persons and groups interested the tools needed for the creation of community development corporations, as well as the creation of small businesses in those municipalities that are members of the Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities Association
- Facilitate the creation of partnerships needed to carry out these projects, in order to ensure their success
- In collaboration with the appropriate institutions and individuals, initiate and participate in the development of training programs for entrepreneurs
- Develop and encourage mechanisms that highlight the value of entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup>

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- The co-operative economy is a specific area of focus
- Works closely with its Manitoba partners in co-op development, MCA and the provincial government





- Draws together a large team to offer support
- Offers economic development services and other supports

### **Weaknesses**

- Does not engage in community-level co-operative promotion or inspire activities
- Mandate to work only on bilingual initiatives within its member communities, but does work with MCA and the provincial government on joint co-op projects





## Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has long been known as a hub of co-operative development, but recent shocks and changes in major players in the co-operative movement (such as the demutualization of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Lilydale Foods, and DairyWorld), combined with a contraction or withdrawal of funding for co-operative development (either to secondary players or to internal government units that used to do extensive co-op development work) has changed the system completely.<sup>6</sup>

### Saskatchewan Co-operative Association

The Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (SCA) is the only official entity involved in co-operative development in Saskatchewan. It is a community-service co-operative formed by provincial co-operative apex groups. SCA's mandate is "working to support and promote the co-operative model for community and economic development."<sup>7</sup>

SCA membership is held to the 12 or so co-operative apex groups or other large-scale co-operative businesses. Although these groups represent numerous grassroots co-ops, its restricted membership means that SCA has limited fundraising capability through membership. There has been some discussion regarding broadening their membership to include community-level co-ops and credit unions, but existing second-tier member co-ops have expressed resistance. SCA currently has limited connectivity back to individual co-ops.

Saskatchewan's provincial government has not created a cognate fundraising pool similar to Manitoba's Tax Credit Fund. As of 2015, SCA has limited support for active, community-based, or group-based co-operative development.

### SCA's Mandate

The SCA mandate is divided into the following avenues of interest:<sup>8</sup>

- **Co-operative Development**

Promote the co-operative model as a mechanism for community and economic development. Provide advisory services, information about the co-op model and training courses related to co-op development, governance and understanding co-operatives.

- **Community Awareness, Business and Government Relations**

Encourage, initiate and participate in activities that represent and advance the collective interests of the co-operative sector. In conjunction with the SCA Public Policy Committee, SCA provides support to help its members advance provincial policy issues.

- **Youth Education and Involvement**

Engage youth in activities and development opportunities that strengthen their capacity and the co-operative sector through the Saskatchewan Co-operative Youth Program.

- **Member Services, Education and Communications**

Provide quality information services that communicate the value of co-operatives and SCA, through events and activities such as the Co-op Merit Awards, Co-op Classic Golf Tournament, and the *Co-operative Spotlight* newsletter.



- **Sustainability and Accountability**

Ensure appropriate funding is in place and allocated to programs and services to implement the strategic goals of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association.

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- SCA has an excellent provincial-level understanding of co-operatives and how long such businesses have operated; SCA's history of co-operatives does not draw on the Rochdale story, but centres the story directly in the province, which shows Saskatchewan people actively using co-operative ideas as a solution to community needs
- Emphasizes Aboriginal and Métis roots in co-operatives in Saskatchewan
- Distances itself from the CCF; only reference is a critical look at the party's colonial policies
- Large emphasis on future co-operator training through youth development:
  - Full-time staff member dedicated to youth programming
  - Long history of successful camps with a high level of volunteer commitment
    - Camp attendance is down over time
  - Emphasis on entrepreneurship through curriculum development
    - Not well known how these curricula are received or used
- Clearly promotes the importance of the pre-development (*Inspire*) and post-development (*Thrive*) phases of co-operative development, particularly around governance, group cohesion, and post-co-op care
- Self-Assessment Tool provides emergent co-ops with a way to assess their group cohesion
- Merit awards to recognize co-operative activity and achievement
- Co-op-to-co-op connection is promoted through the annual luncheon and a summer golf tournament
- Provides access to webinars as a way to interactively teach/learn the co-operative model
  - Webinars cost \$10 each, which is inexpensive but can be seen as a barrier if groups do not like to use PayPal or other online credit card functions
- Provides numerous co-op examples
- Newsletters available and easy to access
- Co-op development services available, but limited
- Co-op Facts and Figures emphasize the role of co-operatives in Saskatchewan's business and social economy
- SCA did a self-consultation process in 2013 with its members to strategize direction and new programming
- Is working closely with Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network (SFNEDN), CMC, and the Saskatchewan Office of the Treaty Commissioner to understand and promote co-op development with Aboriginal communities; in fall 2015, SCA and



SFNEDN co-published *Local People, Local Solutions: A Guide to First Nation Co-operative Development in Saskatchewan*

- SCA was awarded a CMC Aboriginal co-operative development grant, which supported the collaborative research and development of this guide

### Weaknesses

- SCA and the co-operative community in Saskatchewan are deeply affected by their perceived ties to the left side of the political spectrum; Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF, forerunner of today's NDP) history is rooted here
- With the current government at the political centre/right, SCA has had little influence on changing policies (legal, taxation, investment, or other considerations) to effect real change within the co-operative sector along the lines of what has been accomplished in Manitoba and Alberta
  - In the 2013 consultation process, the larger stakeholder co-operatives wanted to do their own advocacy; smaller co-ops want SCA to provide that voice; a tension in this area
- Province of Saskatchewan does not hold ongoing or effective meetings with SCA representatives
- SCA does not engage in entrepreneurship or advocacy through connecting to existing power groups or brokers, such as attending annual conferences (SARM, SUMA, various major agricultural mass events, business forums or expositions), presenting opinion or position papers, or participating as guest speakers and panelists in other public forums
- New co-op registrations and start-ups have slowed in recent years
- Structure as an apex organization with only 12 core members means that there is a limit to its ability to raise operating revenue through its membership structure
  - Disconnect between SCA and grassroots co-ops in Saskatchewan
  - Cannot function as a connector, matching co-operative people with nascent groups, or co-ops-to-co-ops for support
- Few sustained working collaborations between SCA and the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
- SCA has not conducted province-wide research on current co-operative knowledge or challenges
  - Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia have all initiated co-operative research to investigate various questions
- Co-op development services available on request; little direct support or active development outreach; pricing for services is not shown
  - A fee-for-service shows the value of co-op development and allows nascent co-op groups to find ways to purchase these services
- No funding mechanisms for nascent co-ops to access development funding
- No separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development available on the website



## Conseil Économique et Coopératif de la Saskatchewan

Conseil Économique et Coopératif de la Saskatchewan (CÉCS) supports Francophone economic development in Saskatchewan, including co-operatives. With offices in Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon, CÉCS reaches several areas of the province to support Francophone communities and entrepreneurs.

CÉCS focuses on three specific areas:

- **Entrepreneurship**

Stimulating the creation, development, and expansion of Francophone businesses in Saskatchewan.

- **Community Economic Development**

Encouraging individuals, businesses, and communities to capitalize on the economic potential of their region.

- **Capacity Building**

Supporting communities to organize and take control of community economic development.

Through its membership in the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDÉE), the CÉCS is able to make a wealth of services available to the province's Francophone communities.

Whether it is sharing best practices, raising awareness of entrepreneurship, or supporting and increasing employability, RDÉE Saskatchewan (CÉCS) can contribute to the success of your business or to the development of your community.<sup>9</sup>

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- Economic development services are free, through economic development advisors
- A member of Co-operatives and Mutuels Canada
- Creates specific initiatives around immigrant groups
- Focuses on capacity development and community-based growth

#### **Weaknesses**

- Supports exclusively Francophone and Francophile initiatives
- Does not directly engage in co-operative promotion; co-ops are not listed as an area of activity
- Is not obviously connected to other co-operative associations
- Does not support *Thrive* activities connecting co-ops-to-co-ops



## Alberta

Alberta has long been known as a conservative province, but its co-operative roots run deep. A number of robust co-operative enterprises can be found in strategic areas. There are two main groups that work with Alberta's co-operative community and help grow co-operatives.

### Alberta Community and Co-operative Association

In Alberta, co-operative development is shepherded by the Alberta Community and Co-operative Association (ACCA). Its mandate and funding model is slightly broader than the other three provincial organizations. Its origins are recent: In 2005, the Alberta Co-op Council merged with the Rural Education and Development Association (REDA). The new ACCA still leads many of the programs offered by REDA.<sup>10</sup>

Because of this dual co-operative and community development history, the ACCA is the most leveraged of the four provincial organizations, with seven people on staff. The ACCA is a co-operative led by a board of directors and has 31 full and auxiliary members contributing dues to the organization.

### ACCA's Objectives

- Foster co-operative development in Alberta communities
- Support our members through events, workshops, networking, and communication platforms
- Provide expertise to organization development and strategic partnerships
- Organize networking and educational opportunities for community-based organizations
- Facilitate leadership programs for youth
- Administer internship programs
- Support social and economic development
- Advocate for co-operative solutions and people-powered projects
- Recognize organizational and individual leaders throughout the sector<sup>11</sup>

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- The ACCA is well connected with its provincial membership through a large, open membership base
  - Stratified system of membership dues, based on the size, needs, and priorities of the co-operative member
- Broad mandate to pursue community revitalization and development through collective action (which may or may not include co-ops)
- Most extensive system of co-op development in place, in part because of its leveraged position
  - Double the staff of the other three western provinces



- Staff are spread around the province; this system approaches a more extension-services role, with people embedded within communities and able to facilitate in-person visits
- Success in lobbying the provincial government to open new channels and policy windows specifically for co-operative innovation
  - Unleashing Local Capital initiative, in particular, has drawn a tremendous amount of interest across Canada
- Co-ordinates programs left over from the old rural development organization, which connects to all rural communities
- Has an active program of co-operative research
  - Has produced a white paper on co-operative development and initiated its own co-operative development rural innovation program in 2009 that took the co-operative model to communities
  - Was a partner in BALTA, the British Columbia–Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance, which brought out a number of research papers directly related to co-ops
- Hosts and initiates international co-operative connections, such as Plunkett group visits to/from UK and study group tours in the United States
- Hosts an annual meeting of co-operative groups, which facilitates good co-op-to-co-op connections and support
- Strong social media component
- Has effective newsletters, sent out regularly and posted to website
- Large training component for adults
  - Ag leadership training
  - Parliamentary procedures
- Strong youth program, which runs all summer
- Mentors and develops young adult education not through curriculum development but through active “co-op” internship programming offered specifically to credit unions and co-operatives
  - Interns are expected to learn about the co-operative model through this program and through their orientation with ACCA
  - Program gives a tangible win-win to postsecondary students
- The ACCA is astute in leveraging its co-operative connections into the political field
  - It is active and gives presentations to large, influential stakeholder groups such as the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
  - Advocacy and reaching government power brokers through giving presentations, networking, and operating booths at such large-scale events is a tremendous strength and a reflection of today’s connected landscape
- ACCA was awarded a 2015 CMC Aboriginal co-operative development grant and has developed internal strategies around Aboriginal co-op development





- Currently working on an Aboriginal services co-operative in northern Alberta to leverage opportunities in oil and gas development

## Weaknesses

- The website does not show co-operative development nor its pricing as a functional ACCA activity
- Heavy emphasis on the Opportunity Development Co-operatives (Unleashing Local Capital) means less energy to put into other niche or nascent co-ops; there are few other examples of how a co-op can be a solution
- No provincial fund for co-op development or for nascent co-ops to grow to the next stage
- Does not provide a list of co-operative development steps
  - Groups do not have access to enough resources to even get started unless they follow the right links to get that information from other non-ACCA websites
- ACCA focuses heavily on the mechanics, financials, and governance of a co-op (*Create*), without the balance of *Inspire* activities
  - It is possible that the social cohesion component is more clearly noted and worked through during the development process, but it is not anywhere on the website
  - In its white paper on co-operative development, it was clear that the ACCA believes that group development, decision-making, and governance processes can make the co-op model less nimble than other business models
- Youth retreats are held at the Goldeye Centre; ACCA manages the finances and some operations of the Goldeye Foundation, which owns and operates the centre
  - ACCA staffing resources flow towards Goldeye and its corporate function as a retreat and conference centre; unclear how this centre contributes to the overall mandate of co-operative and community development
- ACCA has limited postsecondary reach into provincial universities for research or teaching about the co-operative model
- No separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development are available on the website

## Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta

Alberta also has an economic development group that focuses on the needs of Francophone Albertans. The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDÉA) aims to increase the economic participation and success of Francophones in Alberta.

### Mission (translated from French)

Through our leadership, create an economic force by fostering Francophone businesses and employability, resulting in a better future.

## Values





**Expertise:** By sharing their knowledge and expertise, our specialists are an important resource to support you and your projects.

**Receptivity:** We demonstrate our interest in your success by listening attentively to better understand your needs and potential.

**Catalyst:** We are the spark, the instigator, and the support network for the Francophone community's economic development.

**Avant-garde:** We anticipate trends and develop strategies to help you reach your objectives.

**Dynamic:** We are positive and proactive and take the initiative to reach out to our clients.

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- The CDÉA is well placed, with offices in Edmonton, Calgary, Bonnyville, and Grande Prairie
- Co-op development is a specific area of focus
- Aims to develop human as well as business capital
- Economic development services are free and include specialists in rural economic entrepreneurship

#### **Weakness**

- Does not host community-level events to inspire or insert co-ops into the larger economic development picture
- Limited to aiding the Francophone community



## British Columbia

British Columbia has pockets of co-operative strength, where there is significant co-operative knowledge embedded within the communities. Two in particular are the Kootenay region around Nelson, BC, and the Cowichan region of Vancouver Island. As a direct result of geography, distance, and local community engagement, there are two active groups advancing co-operative development in BC. The first is the provincial British Columbia Co-operative Association, which services BC as a whole and acts as the main lobby group with provincial decision makers. The second is the Upper Columbia Co-operative Council.

### British Columbia Co-operative Association

The British Columbia Co-operative Association (BCCA) is run by three full-time employees: the executive director, the director of co-op development, and an office manager. A registered second-tier co-operative, it is an apex organization of local, regional, and larger co-operatives. Members pay dues based on a sliding scale, depending on their size, membership, or other differentiation. These dues are clearly delineated on the website. BCCA staff report to a board of directors.

The BCCA also works closely with Devco, a worker co-op of co-op developers. Devco developers bring their expertise to nascent co-ops in British Columbia, across Canada, and around the world.

BCCA's current mandate includes:

- Developing new co-ops
- Strengthening and supporting existing co-ops
- Educating and promoting co-operative solutions to the challenges facing BC's communities, which includes bringing co-ops to new sectors of the economy, such as health care
- Introducing young people to the advantages of membership in co-ops and credit unions
- Linking co-ops together to share ideas and solve problems common to them all
- Sharing services and technical expertise amongst co-ops and credit unions
- Forging partnerships with other institutions, governments, and countries to build new relationships and strengthen the co-op movement in the province
- Offering graduate level co-op education
- Promoting co-operation, in collaboration with other organizations and all levels of government, as key to addressing challenges and opportunities that are unique to British Columbia<sup>12</sup>

### *Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

- BCCA membership draws directly from not only the larger co-ops and credit unions, but also creates direct linkages with smaller, tier-one co-operatives of all sizes
  - Its fee structure is built to accommodate both broad-based connections from major co-operatives, and small and nascent co-operatives



- BCCA employs a mix of passive co-op development (walk-ins or calls) and active co-op development (hosting ElderCare and food hub meetings throughout the province)
  - There is a clear commitment to all four stages of co-op development
- Social media is active
- All co-op development questions flow through the Momentum Centre
  - On-line webinars on aspects of co-operative development are planned well in advance and attract on-line attendees
  - The Momentum Fund helps existing co-ops access loans to grow and develop
  - There is a clear pricing strategy for co-operative development
    - Early co-op consultation is free
    - Fee-for-service is clearly outlined
- With British Columbia's geographic limitations, the BCCA relies on its network of local co-operators, who are avid supporters of new co-ops
  - These people often become community animators, either as supporters, entrepreneurs, or sometimes as co-op developers
- In partnership with Alberta, BCCA has invested in extensive research on co-operatives as a social economy model, particularly as part of BALTA: The BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance. See its website at <http://www.socialeconomy-bcalberta.ca/>.
  - Both the Alberta and BC association representatives cited this work as critical as they move forward with different strategies in co-operative development
- Close connections to local universities through both teaching (Simon Fraser) and the BC Centre for Co-operative and Community-Based Economy (Victoria).
- In its role as an advocate, the BCCA draws together the issues and concerns of all types of co-operatives and moves them onto the political stage
  - In drawing members, BCCA cites its advocacy role first; connectivity to the co-operative sector second; mentorship third; and its education/information role fourth
- With a clear connection to Devco as a network of co-op developers, BCCA draws strength and depth from those who have worked in the sector for many years
- Youth component is through curriculum
  - Youth summer camp (YES camp) is under the auspices of Central 1, BC's credit union central; there is no drain on BCCA staff time, energy, or financial resources to promote the camp

## Weaknesses

- BCCA's head office is in Vancouver, a large urban centre
  - The majority of its work is with urban co-ops, mainly in Vancouver; there may be slippage in servicing or supporting nascent rural or Aboriginal co-ops
- Accessing the free *Cultivating Co-ops* guide requires registration and an email; it is not available directly for download



- No separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development
- No provincial funding mechanism for co-op development activities for groups
- It is unknown how northern BC is represented or supported
- There are no annual gathering events where co-ops can speak with other co-ops
  - The AGM for BCCA may perform this function to some extent

## Upper Columbia Cooperative Council

The Upper Columbia Cooperative Council (UCCC) is a local community service co-op founded by co-operatives and credit unions in the Nelson/Kootenay region of BC. The council is affiliated with the British Columbia Co-operative Association “to work locally with its members to strengthen and raise awareness of the region’s vibrant co-op sector.”<sup>13</sup>

### Mission

“The Upper Columbia Co-operative Council works to strengthen co-operatives and credit unions of the Upper Columbia region of British Columbia by providing a structure through which members can collaborate on the promotion and delivery of their services, and by facilitating the sharing and development of resources among members. The Council also aids in marketing the coop identity to members and the general public through awareness-raising campaigns and events.”<sup>14</sup>

### Objectives

- “1. Provide a structure through which coops in Southeastern British Columbia can meet;
2. Facilitate joint promotion and the marketing of members and their interests;
3. Facilitate collaborative planning for members;
4. Facilitate shared education and training for members and boards;
5. Educate the region about the principles and techniques of cooperative enterprise;
6. Promote the development and use of the co-op model for the economic and social development of the region;
7. Secure funding to enable the Association to achieve economic sustainability to fulfill its goals and to provide for the needs of its members;
8. Assist members to effectively present their interests at the regional, provincial, and national level;
9. Promote linkages between regional co-ops and the broader co-op community through membership in BCCA;
10. Ensure benefits and services as members of the BCCA.”<sup>15</sup>



## *Analysis*

### **Strengths**

- Because the UCCC is a regional council, it operates with a slightly different mandate than the provincial association
- The regional focus is on connection and support, co-ops helping co-ops; the organization has 17 active members
  - Members of UCCC were present at CIP-hosted community events in the region
- Employs a network of volunteer co-op promoters/local animators
- Using a unique model, members can pay dues locally but retain full membership in the provincial BCCA association

### **Weaknesses**

- Draws from a much smaller, regional base
- Connections to larger networks outside of BCCA are less clear
- No separate targets, goals, or outlines regarding Aboriginal co-operative development
- Unknown if the balance of activity is active or passive
- Unknown if there are regional gathering events for co-op mentorship and development



## Summary Findings

There are different structures in place to promote the larger co-operative environment within each province. Each association or ministry has strengths and weaknesses. Each entity has a mixed mandate and support for co-operative development.

1. Co-op development is somewhat more active in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba.
  - a. British Columbia
    - i. Formalized co-op development pricing strategies through the Momentum Centre
    - ii. Some open community meetings focused on innovative co-op ideas
    - iii. Some regional- and local-based promoters and developers
      1. Limited reach beyond Greater Vancouver, except through regional networks or already-active co-operative communities
      2. No specific focus on Aboriginal co-operative development
      3. No (listed) co-op associations that focus on non-English-speaking communities
  - b. Alberta
    - i. Has a broader mandate and broader base to rural extension
    - ii. Formalized organizational support, in two languages
    - iii. Focuses on promoting innovative ideas and cascading those lessons into new communities
    - iv. Recent innovations in Aboriginal co-operative development
  - c. Manitoba
    - i. Three entities (MCA, Government of Manitoba, and CDEM) actively promote co-operatives; other entities (SEED Winnipeg) also work to promote and support co-operatives; all groups work together on provincial-level co-op development strategies
      1. Current initiative to bring Aboriginal groups into the co-op discussion
    - ii. There are more people in place through extension services than in other provinces
      1. Northern Manitoba and Aboriginal co-operative development requires greater support and focus
2. Co-op development is somewhat more passive in Saskatchewan.
  - a. Saskatchewan
    - i. Best model of co-operative development, including pre- and post-development phases
    - ii. Weakest mandate for co-op development, which seems less important than other areas such as youth camps
    - iii. Rural and Aboriginal co-operative development requires a stronger mandate to build on current and past success



1. Recent work with Aboriginal communities, including building a new guidebook for Aboriginal co-op development, is strong
3. Funding for co-operative development (that nascent groups can access and use to spend on co-operative development) exists sporadically.
  - a. British Columbia
    - i. Momentum Fund offers loans to existing co-operatives for growth initiatives, but is not available for co-operative development
    - ii. Formalized pricing structures for co-op development services
  - b. Alberta
    - i. Focus on Opportunity Development Co-ops, for communities to build their own funds
    - ii. No other information on funding sources for nascent co-ops to spend on development
  - c. Saskatchewan
    - i. No information on funding sources for nascent co-ops to spend on development
  - d. Manitoba
    - i. Tax Credit Fund: co-ops and credit unions contribute to this fund, administered by MCA; emerging co-ops can access this fund for development purposes
4. Websites are a passive tool of co-op development, but necessary as a first point of connection when there is limited community-based co-operative development.
  - a. Where visits or formal or informal networking events through community animators or community-based extension agents are in place, co-op development is active and healthy
5. Aboriginal co-op development, policy, engagement, goals, or best practices may require a sustained strategy, embedded in the mandate of the organization.
  - a. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta are actively working toward this goal
    - i. Alberta is working on an Alberta Aboriginal Development Co-operative, to both test a new model of co-operative development with Aboriginal communities and pilot a new co-operative
    - ii. Saskatchewan has built a relationship with the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network and the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to create new guidelines and ideas around Aboriginal co-operative development
    - iii. Manitoba is working with the Aboriginal community as part of its efforts to continually improve its co-op development strategies
  - b. British Columbia is not working toward this goal
6. All of the provincial co-operative associations face organizational funding challenges.





- a. Sector support is spread
  - b. Different funders support co-operative associations in each province
  - c. Some funders are listed across all four provinces; others are specific to individual provinces; this may cause tension between provincial focus and pan-provincial initiatives
7. Where membership in the provincial organizations is limited to apex groups, the provincial association has limits.
    - a. It cannot access grassroots people for support or information
    - b. It cannot connect co-ops to co-ops
    - c. It cannot broaden its funding support base
    - d. The needs of large co-ops (which are typically apex group members) may be very different from the needs of small co-ops that are not direct members except through their apex group, or in cases where their style of co-operative does not have an apex group
      - i. There can be tension between small and large co-ops over certain activities, such as advocacy with provincial governments; large co-ops typically promote their own interests; small co-ops have no one to speak for them
  8. Provincial organizations that support research are stronger and more self-reflective.
    - a. Such research may be different from the research undertaken by academic groups such as the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
  9. All provinces support youth development through curriculum.
    - a. Uptake of these curriculum supports is not known
  10. All provinces have youth development through leadership weekends and/or camps.
    - a. BCCA does not operate the BC co-op youth camp; it is operated by a separate entity
    - b. ACCA and SCA operate full-scale summer camps
    - c. MCA operates a youth weekend retreat (mini-camp)
  11. Adult development (education on governance, leadership, business) varies and requires Internet connectivity and knowledge.
    - a. British Columbia operates a Co-ops 101 seminar twice per month and an ongoing webinar series
    - b. Alberta offers online training events on leadership, agriculture, parliamentary procedures, and co-operative training
    - c. Saskatchewan sells webinars on aspects of co-operatives
    - d. Manitoba does not offer training on its website
  12. All provincial co-operative associations list advocacy as a mandate. It is more important for some than for others.
    - a. Where advocacy is more important (BC, Alberta), there has been more energy, innovation, and success
    - b. Where advocacy is less important (SK, MB), the results are mixed



- i. In Manitoba, partly due to active co-op development by government, there is more support for the sector through taxation policies or other assistance
- ii. In Saskatchewan, there may be competing roles and goals between SCA and some of its larger member organizations that develop their own advocacy targets

13. Co-op development in western Canada is not evenly focused across the four Plunkett stages of *Inspire*, *Explore*, *Create* and *Thrive*.

- a. Co-op development tends to focus best on *Create*, helping groups through the technical steps of developing a co-op
- b. There is some emphasis on *Explore*, when groups come to co-op developers for advice on the co-op model
- c. There is limited emphasis on *Thrive* activities
  - i. British Columbia and Alberta host webinars on leadership, governance, boards, budgeting, and membership recruitment
  - ii. Saskatchewan and Manitoba offer few *Thrive* services
- d. There is limited emphasis on *Inspire* activities, particularly for rural or Aboriginal communities
  - i. The majority of activities are youth-based education
  - ii. There is little emphasis on adult education or open community meetings to discuss co-operative solutions



## Conclusion

Robust rural and Aboriginal co-operative development must have a strong mandate. It requires focused energy, attention, and support.

Passive co-op development (waiting for a group to call or knock on the door) presumes a high degree of co-operative knowledge by those wishing to start a co-operative or explore the idea. The Co-operative Innovation Project has shown that such innate knowledge is dwindling. Reversing this trend will require active co-operative development, with community-based extension and support. Active community-based agents will initiate more *Inspire* and *Explore* conversations with communities about the possibilities of the co-operative model.

Co-operative development funding is a critical component. In western Canada, only Manitoba has funding available to groups looking to form a new co-operative. Strong research from Alberta and British Columbia shows that co-operative development aided by a knowledgeable co-operative developer creates a more effective and robust co-op. If groups were able to access funding to purchase professional development help, they would experience more success.

Direct co-operative education events, such as summer camps and leadership weekends, are aimed at youth. Curriculum development favours secondary school, with some postsecondary success. While important, the focus on youth in live, interpersonal events means that adult education events are relegated to on-line webinars. There may be a missing link with rural and Aboriginal communities unable to effectively connect on-line. There may be a critical opportunity to create regional-based gatherings that focus on adult co-operative education events. In areas of western Canada where formal or informal events take place, co-operative development is more active and robust. There may be a correlation between active co-operative development and personal connections and networking.

Networking is also important in connecting co-ops to other co-ops. Provincial associations that have an open membership structure exhibit better success at connecting co-ops to each other and building a more robust provincial co-operative environment. Limiting membership to apex groups means that co-op associations have fewer direct networking connections to small co-operatives and cannot act as effective connecting agents. Such connections will help co-ops to *Thrive*.

Aboriginal co-operative development requires relationship-building and long-term commitment, as well as specialized knowledge (see previous chapter in this report). Co-operative development with Aboriginal communities requires depth, focus, and effort.

Advocacy with provincial governments is critical to develop policies that support a robust co-operative environment. Co-operative development initiatives can find greater traction if there is widespread provincial and federal support in collaboration with the co-operative sector. The Tax Credit Fund in Manitoba is an example of a successful co-op development initiative.

Finally, co-operative development in western Canada is uneven when compared to the Plunkett model of co-operative development phases (*Inspire*, *Explore*, *Create*, and *Thrive*). Current co-operative development practices favour technical support to develop a co-op through to incorporation. There is limited emphasis on pre-development *Inspire* and *Explore* stages, and limited work with existing co-operatives to ensure they have the tools to *Thrive*. The Co-operative



Innovation Project suggests that rural and Aboriginal co-operative development in western Canada will be more robust if these stages receive equal attention.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> These websites were screen-captured in March/April 2015 for analytical purposes. Any recent changes to these websites, or new website updates, are not included in this analysis.

<sup>2</sup> <http://manitoba.coop/Page.aspx?MainPageID=about-mca&MenuPageID=our-members>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://manitoba.coop/Page.aspx?MainPageID=about-mca&MenuPageID=business-plans>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.manitoba.coop/>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cdem.com/en/about/mandate>

<sup>6</sup> For a full overview of the changes in the past thirty years, see Mitch Diamantopoulos, "Globalization, Social Innovation, and Co-operative Development: A Comparative Analysis of Quebec and Saskatchewan, 1980–2010," PhD dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.sask.coop/about\\_sca.html](http://www.sask.coop/about_sca.html).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.sask.coop/about\\_sca.html](http://www.sask.coop/about_sca.html).

<sup>9</sup> <http://cecs-sk.ca/en/about-us/about-us/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://acca.coop/about-us/what-is-acca/>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://acca.coop/about-us/what-is-acca/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://bccacoop/content/what-bcca>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://uccc.coop/about-uccc/what-is-the-uccc/>.

<sup>14</sup> <http://uccc.coop/about-uccc/mission-vision-goals-and-objectives/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.