



THE CO-OPERATIVE INNOVATION PROJECT

WHAT IS THE CO-OPERATIVE INNOVATION PROJECT?

In November 2013, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan entered into a partnership with Federated Co-operatives Limited to explore co-operative development in rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada. A co-operative is a business owned and operated by its customers; it involves a group of people coming together to provide a solution to their common needs. Co-operatives can make a positive contribution to a community. They offer opportunities for economic and community development in important areas such as housing, social services, retail, energy, and recreation.

The Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP) is exploring co-operative development in rural and Aboriginal communities across western Canada. A number of studies have examined rural communities in western Canada over the past sixty years. The largest took place close to 30 years ago. Given the tremendous changes occurring in rural and Aboriginal communities, it is time to look at them again. One of the changes is the closer connection between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in rural areas. This connection has not been examined before. Another issue is the stress of population change driven by new technologies in agriculture, demographic shifts such as the aging population, and resource development. We want our work to reflect the voices of the people living in your community. With your help, we're hoping to paint a picture of life, today, in your community and across western Canada.

Over the next year, the CIP team will be visiting a wide variety of communities across western Canada. Working with local people, we'd like to learn about the social and economic characteristics of particular communities. We're looking for the connections between certain community characteristics and co-operative success. We'd like to find a new approach to co-operative development that is more responsive to the unique characteristics and needs of rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada.

Over the next year the Co-operative Innovation Project will:

1. Determine the tools and services needed for co-operative start-up.
2. Identify community characteristics favourable to successful co-operative development.
3. Collect information on these characteristics from communities in western Canada through surveys and community meetings.
4. Explore connections between these community characteristics and past co-operative development success.
5. Use this information to develop one or more new approaches to co-operative development.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

We will be visiting rural census subdivisions in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Our goal is to develop strong community relationships and identify the patterns that shape co-operative development.



HOW WILL WE BE ENGAGING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY?

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

We will be holding community meetings in about 30 communities in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. We will be inviting the residents of your community to come and discuss local needs and explore possible solutions.

WHO WILL BE INVITED?

These meetings will be open to everyone in the community who wants to attend. We will invite a range of individuals and stakeholder groups with diverse backgrounds. This could include local residents, stakeholders, teachers, business owners, or service agency staff.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

- An opportunity to discuss needs and challenges in your community and uncover possible solutions.
- Explore ways to keep capital in your community.
- In return for allowing us to come into your community, we will give you a document that contains a summary of everything we discussed. This will include socio-economic data about your community and the surrounding area.

WEB SURVEY

We will be conducting a survey on the Internet to obtain more information about rural and Aboriginal communities in western Canada. We will be sending emails to community administrators in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. We will use the information from these surveys to provide a more in-depth understanding of communities from an administrative perspective.

TELEPHONE SURVEY

We will be conducting a telephone survey to measure the perceptions of citizens in rural and Aboriginal communities across western Canada. The survey will capture a respondent’s views about the services missing from his or her community and about the social and political nature of the community. The survey will be administered by a third-party company that will randomly select telephone numbers and contact individuals 18 years and older.

WHAT IS OUR TIMELINE?

December 2014 – February 2015	Conduct telephone and web surveys
January 2015 – April 2015	Visit sample of rural and Aboriginal communities
April 2015 – June 2015	Data analysis
July 2015 – September 2015	Report writing
September 2015 – December 2015	Presentation of final reports

WHO IS FUNDING THIS PROJECT?

FEDERATED CO-OPERATIVES LIMITED

Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) is a multi-faceted organization that is based on the principles of co-operation. It is owned by approximately 225 retail co-operatives located throughout western Canada. These co-operatives are the “member-owners” of FCL. FCL provides central wholesaling, manufacturing, marketing, and administrative services to its member-owners.



WHO IS MANAGING THIS PROJECT?

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CO-OPERATIVES

As one of the top co-op research centres in the world, the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives is interested in better understanding the process by which co-operatives are developed and the impact they have on their members and communities. The Centre is also interested in the development of co-operatives in new communities. This stems from a belief that the co-operative model — with its emphasis on member ownership and control — is inherently valuable.

The project management group (PMG) is the decision-making body for the CIP. The group consists of one individual from each of the following partners:

- Federated Co-operatives Limited
- Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy
- Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
- International Centre for Northern Governance and Development
- The Plunkett Foundation

The PMG receives advice and guidance from an advisory council comprised of executive-level and senior leaders representing the interests of stakeholders and communities. Current members of the council include Saskatchewan Treaty Commissioner George E. LaFond and Executive Vice-President Strategy from Federated Co-operatives Limited, Vic Huard.

A secretariat provides in-kind support to the project management group. The project will also engage other stakeholders in various roles.

IN CONCLUSION

We're looking for an approach to building co-operatives in rural and Aboriginal communities that reflects the voices, needs, and aspirations of the people living there. We're hoping to build relationships with communities such as yours. We want to hear about your community and its history, about its unique needs and interests. We'd like to work together to help you learn more about how you can draw on local expertise and knowledge to find solutions to your community needs through the co-operative business model.

If you would be interested in hearing more about our project or would like to participate in one of our community meetings, we would love to hear from you.

To reach us, please call Rhiannon Klein, Dazaway Parker, or Nicole McLaren at (306) 966-2946.