

B.C.- Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)

Project A11 – Co-ops Survival Rates in BC and Alberta

- A. Full title of project: Survival rates of co-ops in BC and Alberta**
- B. With which BALTA SERC Is this project associated? Or is it a cross cutting project? SERC 1**

- C. Lead researchers organization names and contact information:**

John Restakis, BCCA, 604-662-3906, restakis@bccca.coop

Michele Aasgard, ACCA, 780-963-3766, maasgard@acca.coop

- D. Names of other researchers and organizations involved: Carol Murray, BCCA, and Richard Stringham, ACCA.**

- E. Description of project, including objectives, outputs and intended outcomes:**

This project aims to research the patterns of co-op formation and dissolution in BC and Alberta over the last ten years. The focus of the research will be to examine the co-operatives that have been incorporated over the last ten years, using a combination of the records of the Registrar of Companies and Co-ops in the two provinces; interviews with incorporated co-ops, and survey tools.

The research aims are to establish:

- a) the number and variety of co-ops incorporated in BC and Alberta over the last ten years;
- b) the conditions that gave rise to the incorporation of these co-ops;
- c) the survival rate of incorporated co-ops;
- d) the reasons for a co-op's discontinuance;
- e) the ways in which a co-op's early development and incorporation might be assisted;
- f) the ways by which a co-op's demise might have been averted.

- F. Purpose and significance of the research, including congruence with the strategic research objectives identified for the SERC and BALTA. Why should this project be approved, given BALTA's limited resources? [Refer to the project criteria in the BALTA Workplans and Project Proposals Policy.]**

Over the last decade there has been a constant interest in the development and incorporation of co-operatives in BC, often spurred on by the co-op development work of sector associations like BCCA, or the availability of government funded

policies and programs, at both provincial and federal levels, specifically aiming at the support of co-op development. In BC, an average of 30-40 co-ops are incorporated every year, and in some years the figure has been as high 70-80 incorporations. This amounts to well over 300 co-ops incorporated in BC over the last ten years.

In contrast to BC, co-operative development efforts in Alberta have been very limited in the past decade until the introduction of the CDI program supports. Even so, there exists a significant gap in our knowledge of the rate of survival and influences on survival of newly incorporated co-operatives in Alberta. The impact of development assistance, the developing group's resources, and environmental factors are currently unknown. Sources of external support are also not known. Information from research into these aspects of Alberta's co-operative development experience would be extremely beneficial in the design of supports and allocation of resources for co-operative development in the province.

In BC and Alberta, there has never been a concerted study of the relation of public policies or sector development strategies with respect to new co-op development and incorporation, nor any study done on the survival rate of newly incorporated co-ops or the reasons for their failure. This is an area of research that is sorely lacking in the co-op sector generally, including BC and Alberta, and the findings from such a study would provide valuable information on the efficacy of co-op development practice in the two provinces, the means by which such practice might be improved, and the environmental factors which either contribute to, or detract from, the development and survival of co-ops in both provinces.

G. Will the project involve student researchers in a paid or unpaid capacity? If yes, will they need to be recruited or have they already been identified? Briefly describe the roles and responsibilities of students involved in the research project, the skills/experience they will acquire, and how this will complement their academic training. Explain as well how adequate supervision and support of the student will be ensured.

The project will require the hiring of one student in each province. The students in BC and Alberta have been identified and will be supervised in their work by senior staff at BCCA and ACCA in their respective province.

The roles and responsibilities of the students include the following:

- a) develop a questionnaire for the survey
- b) identify all relevant databases for the study
- c) work with Registrar's office in accessing relevant documents and databases
- d) work with regional association in identifying and collating relevant materials and documents
- e) conduct telephone interviews with targeted co-ops; complete surveys
- f) update contact lists and databases as appropriate
- g) prepare a report on survey findings

Students will need to have experience in survey design and implementation, excellent communications skills, good writing and analytical skills, some understanding of co-ops and the co-op sector, the ability to work independently.

The project will enhance the student's outreach and research skills; increase their understanding of the co-op sector including factors that determine success and failure of co-op enterprises; and sharpen a student's capacity to gather, organize, and analyze a wide range of factors impacting the start-up, operations, and success or failure of co-op enterprises. Students will also acquire experience working in both non-profit and government environments in the design and conduct of the research.

H. Research activities, plan of work and timetable:

- in consultation with their supervisor, design the survey questionnaire and outreach strategy
- contact as many incorporated co-ops as possible according to the records of the registrar of companies;
- complete the questionnaire through telephone interviews and online surveys
- identify co-ops with whom follow up, face-to-face interviews may be useful
- update/correct contact information
- meet regularly with project supervisor to report/debrief progress
- discuss the organization and content of a final report with supervisor
- draft final report

I. Describe plans for communicating research results within the academic community. Indicate audience and specific output(s) i.e., refereed journal articles, conference presentations or other appropriate channels.

Nothing is planned at this time, though it is conceivable that the research results would be worthy of an academic journal article and/or conference presentation. One potential target could be the 2011 conference of the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation (June 2011 in Fredericton, NB). If this was to happen, BALTA would need to provide financial assistance in 2011 for this purpose.

J. Describe plans for communicating research results outside the academic community to practitioners, policy makers, and other people for whom the research results could be significant. Indicate audience and specific output(s).

Results of the research will be published and made available online, through a special issue of the BCCA and ACCA newsletters, through distribution via the numerous co-op and social economy contacts and networks of the two regional associations, and through distribution to the CCA, the Canadian Regional Co-op Associations, and the variety of Canadian co-op study centers. The results of the study would also be made available to the Canadian Community Economic Development network and local CED networks in each province.

The research results will also be circulated through the BALTA website, newsletter and contacts and via the communication networks of the Centre for Co-op and Community-Based Economy at UVic.

Key audiences include:

- Co-op developers
- Regional Co-op associations
- Co-op researchers
- Policy makers, particularly those associated with the Co-op Development Initiative (CDI)
- The Co-operatives Secretariat
- Canadian Co-op Association

K. Describe your plans for monitoring and evaluating your research project. Feel free to consult with BALTA’s Coordinator on designing possible approaches. (Note that monitoring and evaluation are extremely important both for ensuring the success of the project as well as satisfying reporting to SSHRC.)

The project will be monitored by the project supervisor in each of the two regional associations co-ordinating the research (BCCA, ACCA) and reported to BALTA to include in SSHRC reporting. Student evaluations will be completed by the students and supervisors.

L. What are the research tools you propose to use in your project?

NOTE: If your research involves human subjects, you **MUST** provide copies of your proposed research tools (as well as your research plan) prior to commencing research. Please see the document “*BALTA Ethical Review Process – Simplified*” for information about ethical review requirements.

Research tools involve primarily a survey/questionnaire conducted via telephone interviews.

M. Budget and Contributions

Information can be both dollar figures and anecdotal, including in-kind contributions and requests for BALTA support (eg. staff support for dissemination).

Category	Requested of BALTA	Other Contributions
Student salaries	\$13,500	
Student benefits/overhead costs (if the student will be a CCCR hire, add 10.5% of the student salaries amount; if the student will be employed by another institution, add the relevant		

amount)		
Researcher Release Time	N/A	BCCA: \$3,000; ACCA: \$1,500
Research Support Costs (e.g. supplies, communication costs)	\$700 (BCCA - \$500) (ACCA - \$200)	
Knowledge Dissemination		
Travel	\$800 (\$300 ACCA and \$500 BCCA)	
TOTALS	\$15,000	\$4,500

Budget explanation

Student salaries & benefits

BCCA	9,000
ACCA	4,500

Researcher release time

Travel	BCCA	500
	ACCA	300

Supplies & other	BCCA	500
	ACCA	200

Knowledge dissemination