

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

SERC 3 Project Proposal C13 - Return on Taxpayer Investment for Training Businesses

Objectives, Outputs and Outcomes

The **objective** is to review and summarize, in English, the evaluation research in Quebec, Belgium and France, and any relevant research from the International Conference on Training Businesses held in Montreal, related to the outcomes being achieved by training businesses. With the review particular attention is to be given to the determination of the costs and benefits associated with various training business models, in particular, the return on taxpayer investment being achieved. It is possible that some UK experience may be relevant and be incorporated into the report as well.

The **output** will be a fully referenced report that profiles the application of training businesses, the outcomes they are achieving, the scope and nature of State investment in training businesses and the return on taxpayer investment being achieved and any other cost/benefit calculations being applied in the evaluations of the training business model.

The primary **outcome** will be evidence that can be used by CED, Social Economy, Training and Employment networks to advance a solid case for provincial governments outside of Quebec to invest in training enterprises on a systematic and efficient basis. The project report will be made widely available for use in policy engagement and advocacy and BALTA will explore with relevant partners a potential second phase of work to examine the applicability of the Quebec and other models to the Alberta and BC contexts.

Why this Study?

It is known that in Quebec the training business model is a tool used by the State and communities to engage at risk populations in structured training activity in a production environment. Highly structured skill training is coupled with a range of personal growth and social supports. The results being achieved for the at risk populations is consistently solid. The state support, which ranges in amount depending on the nature of the training business and the earnings it achieves in the market place, is achieving consistently good returns for the taxpayer investment.

While this fact is known by some Anglophone practitioners, the access to the detailed evidence base has been severely constrained by the language barrier. It is therefore difficult to prepare systematic policy briefs that are evidence based.

The proposed study is squarely within the mandate of SERC 3 to track progress. Such tracking has been done in Quebec and perhaps other jurisdictions, Belgium and France being two. It was an identified project in the original proposal that secured the SSRHC funding for BALTA.

Its importance lies in two main areas. First, in B.C. and Alberta labor market shortages are a reality and are likely to persist for some time. Methods for reaching marginalized populations and preparing them for productively contributing to their own income, either through streaming training business graduates into further training or the job market, two of the most common outcomes achieved by training businesses, is increasingly important. Second, this is a proven tool, the challenge is how to adapt and scale up its application outside of Quebec. This is in line with strategic objectives within BALTA, in particular, examining the constraints and opportunities within the two provinces for adapting and scaling up exemplary practices.

Lead researcher, organization name and contact information:

The lead researcher is Doctor Marguerite Mendell from Concordia University. Assisting with supervision and advice is Dr. Jean Marc Fontan, lead co-investigator in the Quebec Research Alliance on the Social Economy. Both are collaborators within BALTA.

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Student Engagement

A Masters or Doctoral student will be recruited from the student base available to both researchers – Concordia and University of Quebec in Montreal. Both have a substantial base of students involved in social economy and CED related studies.

The student will have to be bilingual and capable of writing competently in English.

Under the direction of Dr. Mendell and with advice from Dr. Fontan, the student will seek out, review, summarize and present a draft report. Working with the two researchers involved, analysis of the draft report will be undertaken to ensure salient points relevant to assembling the evidence for purposes of policy advocacy are brought together clearly. The student will then integrate this analysis into a final report.

The student will gain experience in systematic review and documentation of existing evaluation studies. The subject area itself will likely represent new learning, in particular the examination of the material to identify the various ways in which cost-benefit analysis has been done and how return on taxpayer investment is argued. Working with two highly recognized and experienced researchers to undertake an analysis of the findings from the point of view of assembling the evidence in a manner appropriate for policy advocacy also affords significant opportunities for student learning and skill development.

Plan of work and timetable

If approved at the March meetings of SERC 3 and the Steering Committee, the student position posting will be developed in consultation with the lead researchers by the academic coordinator. The posting will be used to recruit a suitable student using the networks of students already known by the two researchers.

The project timeline has not yet been determined by the two researchers, but will be developed and approved by Mike Lewis before student recruitment takes place.

Communicating Research Results

The final report will be posted on the BALTA website. CCEDNet members and members of key provincial employment training and social service networks will be targeted with a summary of the research results and encouragement to review the full report.

Making Waves will carry an article that summarizes the results and the implications for the field. The article will be prepared in such a way as it can serve as a tool for policy advocates.

BALTA, working with its partners, will support exploring options for placing the results in front of policy makers in B.C. and Alberta. It is likely that this could involve some form of Phase 2 project within Alberta and BC to look at applications of the research findings within the Alberta and BC contexts. It is also likely that the results of this project could be relevant to another BALTA project – C9 – CED and Social Economy Policy Inventory in BC and Alberta.

The research report will be published as a working paper by the ARUC social economy research centre at the University of Quebec in Montreal (to be confirmed by Jean-Marc Fontan).

Monitoring and Evaluating Impacts

Given the specific focus of this project, there are only two real outcomes that bear monitoring – the take up of the research results by constituencies who have a direct interest in advocating for the efficacy of the training business mode, and second, where policy change and investment actually takes place in either B.C. or Alberta.

Budget and Contributions

As the scope of the work required is still being determined by the project leads, the precise number of hours required of the student and thus the budget is still to be determined. It is anticipated that the maximum will not exceed 200 hours of work at a salary of \$20/hour.

Category	Requested of BALTA	Other Contributions
Student salaries & benefits	\$ 4,420 (maximum)	
Researcher Release Time		
Research Support Costs		
Knowledge Dissemination		
Travel		
TOTALS	\$ 4,420 (maximum)	