BALTA

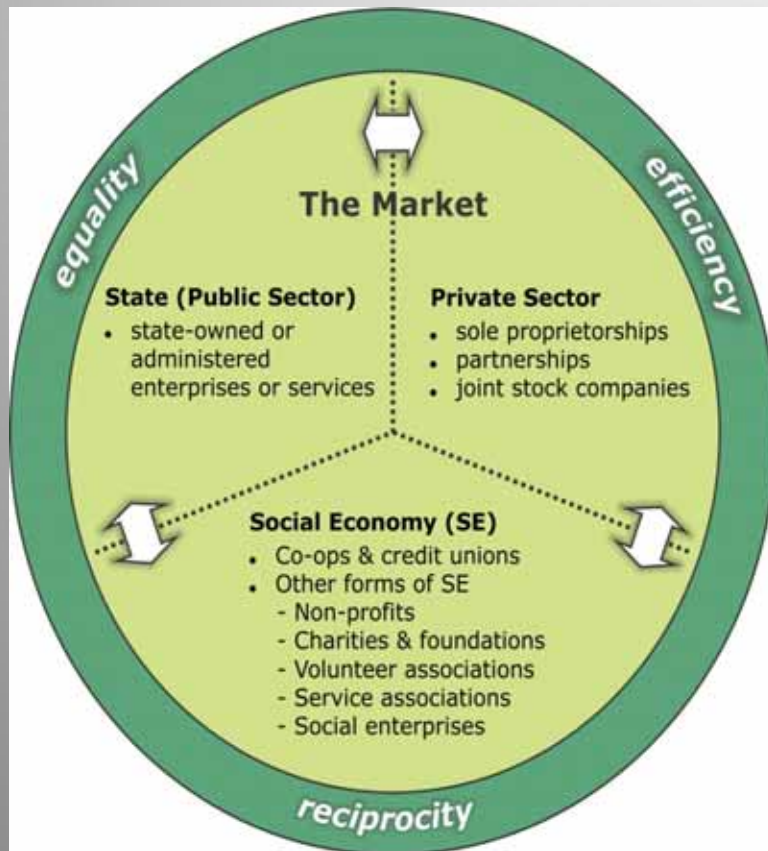**B.C.-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance**

Creating a Social Economy Community of Practice: The BALTA Experience

Mary Beckie, Karen Heisler,
Sean Markey and Stuart Wulff
CU-Expo 2011

What is the Social Economy?

- **Social economy - non-profits, co-operative enterprises and other community organizations that engage in economic activities in order to achieve social objectives**

- **Founded on principles of pluralism, social integration & reciprocity**

- **Significant and growing part of the social and economic infrastructure of Canada – but not well characterized**

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Why a C-U Engagement Research Model?

- **Community-University engagement promotes collaboration for mutual benefit; is well suited to studying emerging and complex social trends**
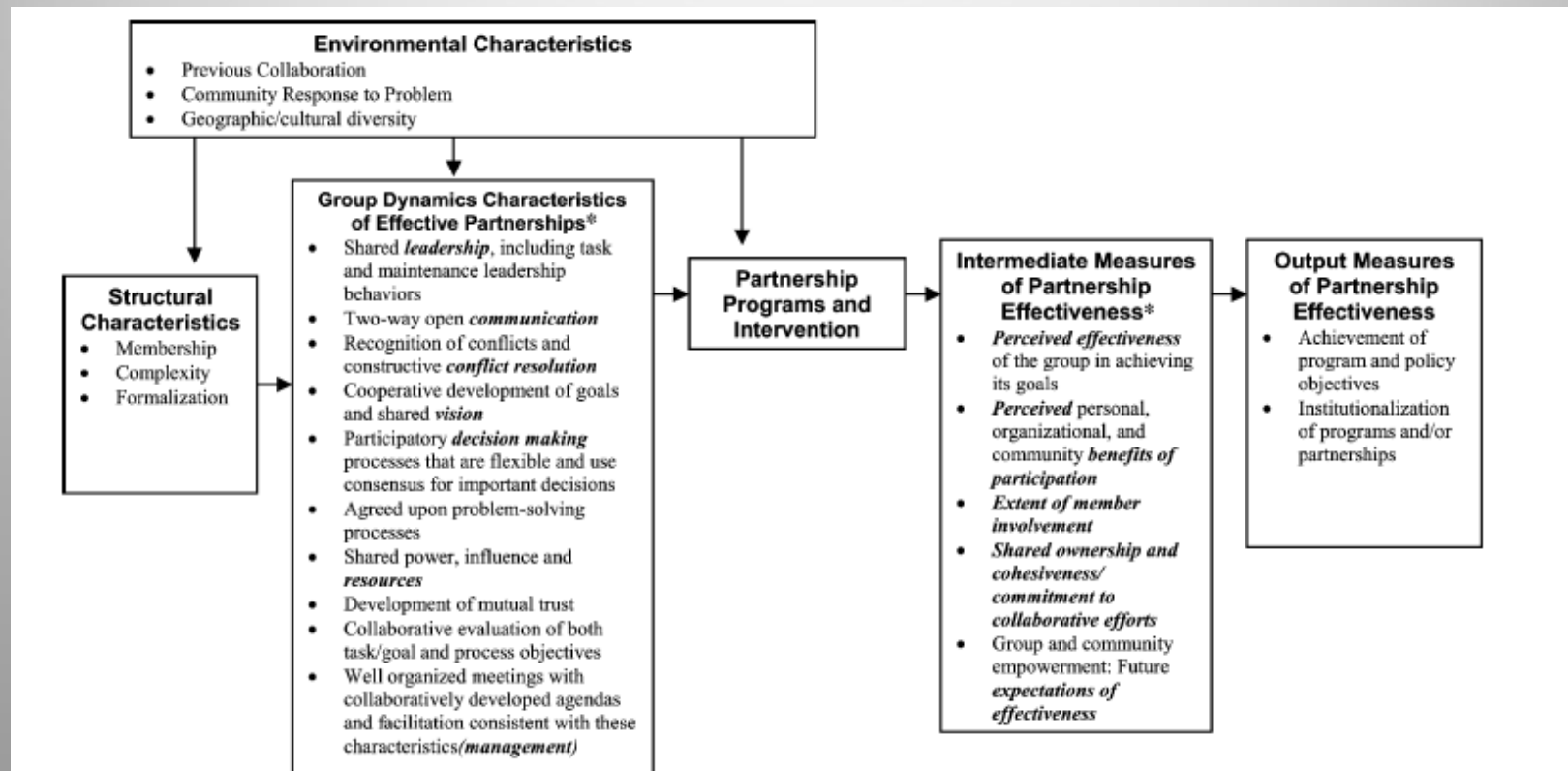
What is BALTA?

- **BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (2006-2012)**

- **Western regional node of the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships network – Funded as seven CURAs (six regional and one national) as SSHRC's Social Economy Suite program**

- **50 academics and practitioners; 9 national and international advisors and collaborators; 70 GRAs**

- **Only practitioner-led node: Canadian Centre for Community Renewal. Exec. Dir = BALTA P.I.**

Evaluation of BALTA's C-U Engagement

- **Purpose: to evaluate effectiveness of the BALTA approach to C-U engagement**

- **Method: Data derived from ongoing monitoring and evaluation program**
  - **Telephone and in-person interviews**
  - **Questionnaires**
  - **Discussions at yearly forums**

- **Analysis: Context-structure-function (Schultz et al. 2003; McNall et al. 2009)**

- **Theory: knowledge and power (Prins 2006)**

Structural Framework for Analysis
(Schultz et al. 2003)

Environmental Characteristics
- Previous Collaboration
- Community Response to Problem
- Geographic/cultural diversity

Structural Characteristics
- Membership
- Complexity
- Formalization

Group Dynamics Characteristics of Effective Partnerships*
- Shared *leadership*, including task and maintenance leadership behaviors
- Two-way open *communication*
- Recognition of conflicts and constructive *conflict resolution*
- Cooperative development of goals and shared *vision*
- Participatory *decision making* processes that are flexible and use consensus for important decisions
- Agreed upon problem-solving processes
- Shared power, influence and *resources*
- Development of mutual trust
- Collaborative evaluation of both task/goal and process objectives
- Well organized meetings with collaboratively developed agendas and facilitation consistent with these characteristics *(management)*

Partnership Programs and Intervention

Intermediate Measures of Partnership Effectiveness*
- *Perceived effectiveness* of the group in achieving its goals
- *Perceived* personal, organizational, and community *benefits of participation*
- *Extent of member involvement*
- *Shared ownership and cohesiveness/ commitment to collaborative efforts*
- Group and community empowerment: Future *expectations of effectiveness*

Output Measures of Partnership Effectiveness
- Achievement of program and policy objectives
- Institutionalization of programs and/or partnerships

* From Johnson and Johnson 1982, 1997. Italicized and bolded items were derived from Johnson and Johnson, and also included in Sofaer 2000. Other items were derived from Johnson and Johnson, and are not included in Sofaer's model.

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for assessing group dynamics as an aspect of effectiveness of community-based participatory research partnerships (Adapted from Sofaer, 2000).

Contextual Factors and Criteria
for C-U Engagement (McNall et al. 2009)

- **Context:**
  - Motivations
  - Prior relationships
  - Competing institutional and professional demands

- **Criteria for successful engagement:**
  - Flexibility and innovation
  - Shared leadership and resources
  - Two way communication
  - Mutual respect/trust and benefit
  - Ongoing evaluation

Motivation, Prior Relationships, Flexibility and Innovation

- **BALTA established to create a model of genuine collaboration, generating theoretical and practical knowledge on the social economy, contributing to a social economy community of practice in Canada.**

- **CCCR – no prior SSHRC relationship; application for institutional approval withdrawn after 2 years; CCCR continued as lead agency but on sub-contracted basis with funding flowing through Royal Roads University**

- **Flexibility and innovation: co-administrative arrangement with Royal Roads; co-dissemination arrangement with Athabasca University; multi-institutional operation and identify**

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Relationships Defining BALTA's Structure
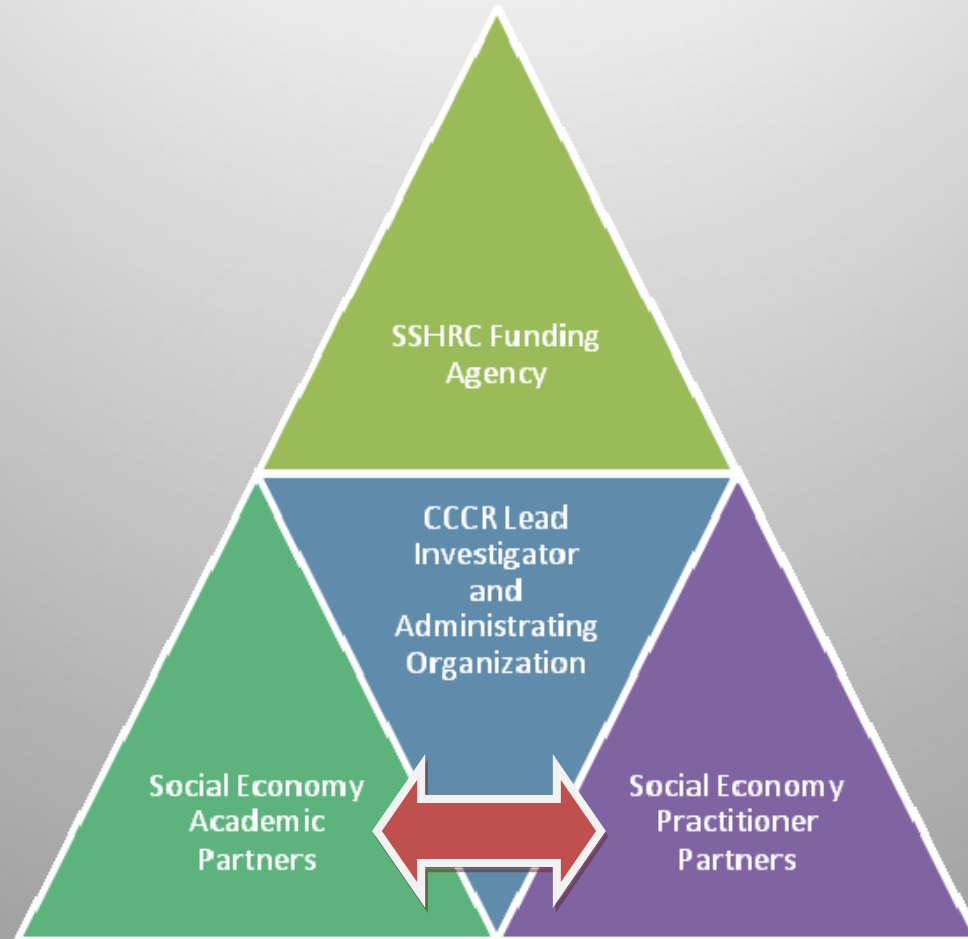
BALTA Governance Model:
Shared Leadership and Resources, Participatory Decision Making

- **Steering committee: equal representation of academics and practitioners in BC and Alberta; CCCR PI is chair. Rule by consensus.**

- **SERCs: co-led by academic and practitioner**
  - **I: Human Services and Affordable Housing**
  - **II: Rural Development & Revitalization**
  - **III: Analysis, Evaluation and Infrastructure**
  - **Mapping and Portraiture Program**
  - **Two stage approval of annual plans**

Two-way Communication, Trust, Reciprocity and Mutual Benefit

- **Two way communication; creating a common vision, priorities, principles of approach, language:**
  - **Forums, SC and SERC meetings, teleconferencing**
  - **Face to face is key, particularly initially**

- **Creating solidarity: relationships of trust take time**
  - **Joint policies & systems to formalize arrangements – <u>and willingness to adapt</u>**
  - **Practitioners linked to community and with knowledge from praxis**
  - **Academics with theoretical knowledge, research methodologies and prior SSHRC relationships**

- **Reciprocity and mutual benefit – constrained by boundaries and barriers**

Roles and Responsibilities
Co-Construction of Research and Knowledge

Roles and responsibilities of academics & practitioners - Influencing, taking decisions and implementing research : Sharing and balancing power matters. Who does what matters.

- **Co-Visioning**
- **Co- Development of policy and other parameters**
- **Co-Planning of research – both broadly and specific research projects**
- **Co-Approval of research**
- **Co-Management**
- **Co-Implementation of research**
- **Co-Analysis/Synthesis of research results**
- **Co-Dissemination of research – Mobilization of research**
- **Co-Evaluation**

Clarity is important in avoiding distrust. So is flexibility and evolution.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Academics: methodological rigor and academic outputs**
- **Practitioners: on-the-ground impact**
- **Both (in different contexts): capacity to do the research – inherent but arises particularly from BALTA's chosen approach to developing research**
- **Various challenges re role of students**
- **SSHRC restrictions on direct monetary compensation for practitioners**
  - **"systemic challenge"; "hinders achieving original vision"**
  - **new SSHRC architecture does not address this**
- **Both: cohesion of BALTA research and long-term sustainability of the network and research effort**

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The Path Forward

- ## 2010–2012: synthesis & knowledge mobilization
  - National and international conferences, BALTA symposium
  - Academic peer-reviewed articles & 2 special issue journals
  - Practitioner and policy outreach, reports, etc.
  - 3 books; articles in practitioner targeted publications
  - Website – news, publications, reports, podcasts

- ## BALTA and beyond?
  - Support emerged for continuing BALTA beyond current grant
  - Maintain & build the network – how to sustain collaborative infrastructure – challenge of securing additional funding
  - 'Constellation network' and 'virtual network' models
  - SSHRC partnership grant application – Sustainability, the Social Economy and Community Transition
  - Spin-off smaller scale partnerships

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Thank you! Questions?

The evaluation and research reflected in this presentation is being published in the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* (in press 2011) as "Expectations and Realities of Engaged Scholarship: Evaluating the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance"

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