



GOING THE DISTANCE

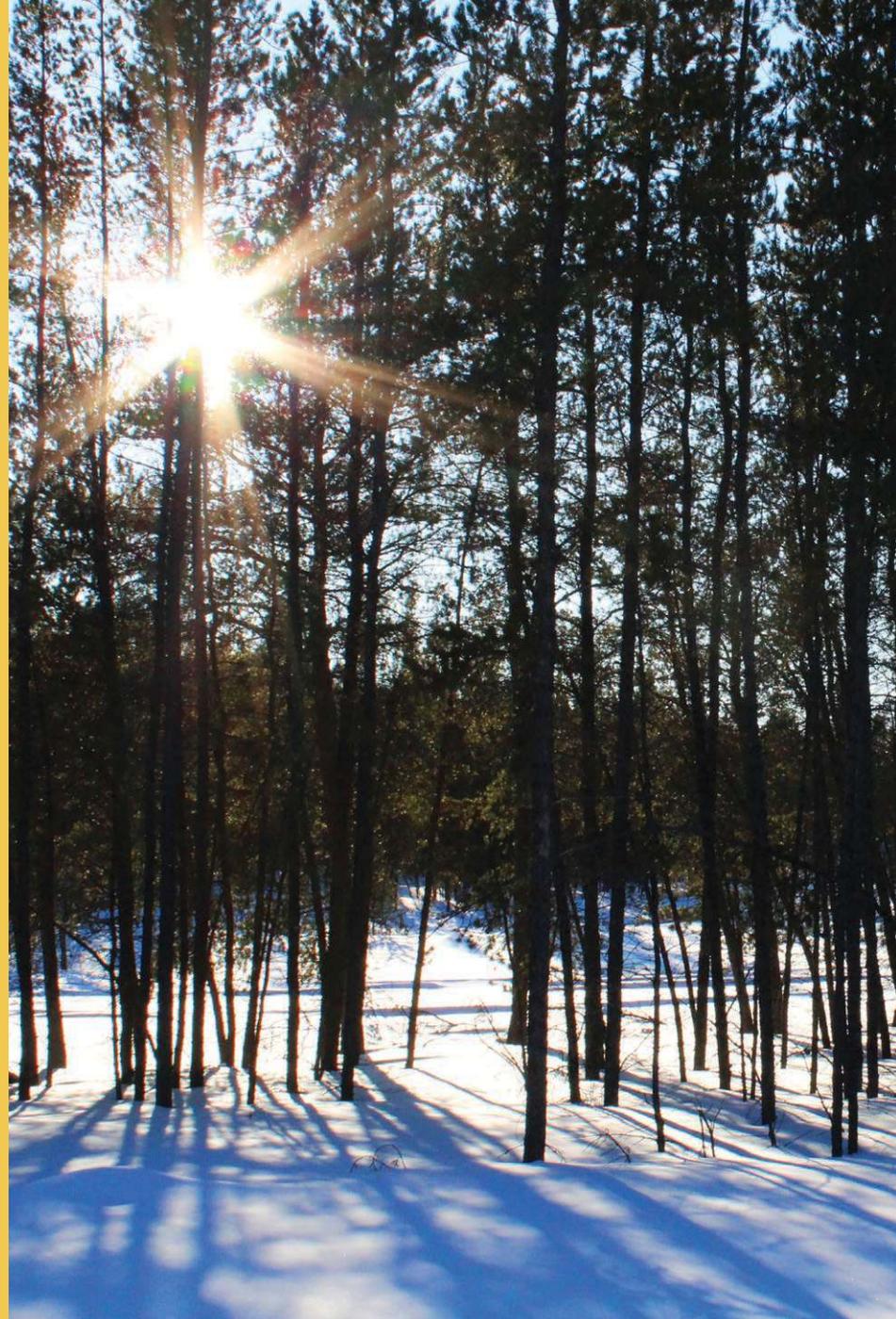
2018 ANNUAL REPORT

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDER

Co-operatives First is funded by the Co-operative Retailing System through Federated Co-operatives Limited. Thanks to the creativity and foresight of CRS and FCL leadership, each year this investment in Co-operatives First supports dozens of groups starting new businesses in rural and Indigenous communities, increases awareness and understanding of the model across western Canada, guides hundreds of co-operative leaders through an online governance course, and maintains a business resource site unique within the co-operative sector.

The level of dedication this investment by CRS and FCL provides to the co-op sector is unmatched in western Canada. Already, within a few short years, the ecosystem co-ops start up and operate in is changing for the better. More economic developers across western Canada better understand and know the co-op model. Rural, First Nations and Metis leaders across western Canada have better tools and resources to start co-ops. And, most importantly, groups in rural and remote areas recognize they have more options when starting a business.

The board and staff of Co-operatives First thank these pioneers, not only for their ongoing (and impressive) financial support, but also for having the ingenuity and courage to do something new and different – something no one else is doing. You truly are *Going the Distance*. Thank you.



2019: WHAT LIES AHEAD

2018 was a year of *Going the Distance* – both literally and figuratively. The team at Co-operatives First has travelled to dozens of communities across western Canada, held numerous meetings with groups looking to start co-ops, and researched, developed and launched a unique resource site, **CoopCreator.ca**.

Besides travel, promotion and product development, Audra and her team have also supported 8 groups of entrepreneurs through some of the more challenging aspects of starting a co-op, helping incorporate the organizations and guide them towards operations.

In order to support the organization's mandate and growth, the board has expanded to include members and perspectives from across western Canada. Together they have been hard at work building the organization's governance, improving financial tracking and reporting and increasing the organization's presence, legitimacy and impact throughout the region.

In 2019, we will build on this solid foundation by creating a long-term vision and undergoing an intensive strategic planning process to set the stage for the next three years.

Thank you to our funder, staff and partners in supporting us as we work to increase awareness of the co-operative business model, support business development based on the model and make a positive impact on rural and Indigenous communities across western Canada.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board of Co-operatives First, I am pleased to offer this report.

Sincerely,

Monica Kreuger

*Chair of the Board of Directors,
Co-operatives First*



GOING THE DISTANCE



2018 was a year filled with learnings, growth and amazing stories. It was also one that required a full team effort and a passion for *Going the Distance*.

From flights on small, bumpy planes to remote, northern regions, rides on a snow-covered road through a forest with signs warning of travel “at your own risk” with “no services – no assistance” for 87 kilometers, and a long drive through an interior BC blizzard on single-lane highways hugging the side of a mountain, we’ve gone the distance.

We’ve visited groups in small prairie towns hoping to start nursing homes, develop housing complexes and save local small businesses. In Alberta, we witnessed the opening of the province’s very first co-operative daycare. In BC, we connected with the hard-to-comprehend, but no less amazing *Neighbour Labs*, which is preparing the west coast for disaster readiness in remarkably innovative ways.

On a small First Nation in central Saskatchewan, we’ve been working with band and council to start the first ever retail co-op on reserve land in that province.

2018 also brought about the launch of the resource site, **CoopCreator.ca**. The site is a major achievement and milestone for us. We invested heavily in research and development of the tools and resources on the site. And we’re not done. As we gather feedback from users and groups on the site, adjustments will be ongoing and improve the experience further. The **CoopCreator.ca** site is a legacy all our stakeholders should be proud to promote and claim a stake in. We feel it sets a standard for the sector to follow and work towards.

Likewise, we continue to grow our reach, influence and presence across western Canada. The better people understand

the co-operative model in rural and Indigenous communities, the more opportunity everyone in the co-op sector has to grow and thrive.

TheBackRoadDiaries.ca captures some of the amazing stories we’re promoting of co-ops and their communities across western Canada.

Thank you to our funder for making this unique investment into western Canada’s rural and Indigenous communities, and for trusting me and my team to take the mandate you’ve set before us and go at it with passion, integrity and perseverance. Thank you also to our board for the oversight and guidance. To our many partners, your support is invaluable. We look forward to working you in 2019.

Sincerely,
Audra Krueger
*Executive Director,
Co-operatives First*

PEOPLE



For the summer of 2018, **Sisan** was our *Backroad Diaries* host. He travelled across the western provinces, visiting 8 communities along the way. While visiting these unique rural and Indigenous communities, Sisan spoke with locals about the role co-ops play in their region, towns and First Nations. The stories he gathered can be read and watched at thebackroaddiaries.ca.



Shellie is a founding member and the visionary behind *Eco Co-operative* in Fraser Lake, BC. This ambitious co-op aims to increase maker and retail space for creators in that community. Shellie hopes to add training opportunities to help keep young people in the area after high school. Our supports provided the co-op guidance through the incorporation process and helped them plan for an amazing future.



In 2018, we introduced *The Common Share* podcast. The podcast focuses on insights from co-op leaders and co-op success stories. One of expert we spoke to was **Dr. Dionne Pohler**, a fellow in Co-operative Strategy and Governance at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan and assistant professor at Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources at the University of Toronto. In the episode, Dr. Pohler outlines how to leverage the co-operative advantage in a rapidly changing world. This episode and others like it can be found at CooperativesFirst.com/Common-Share-Podcast.

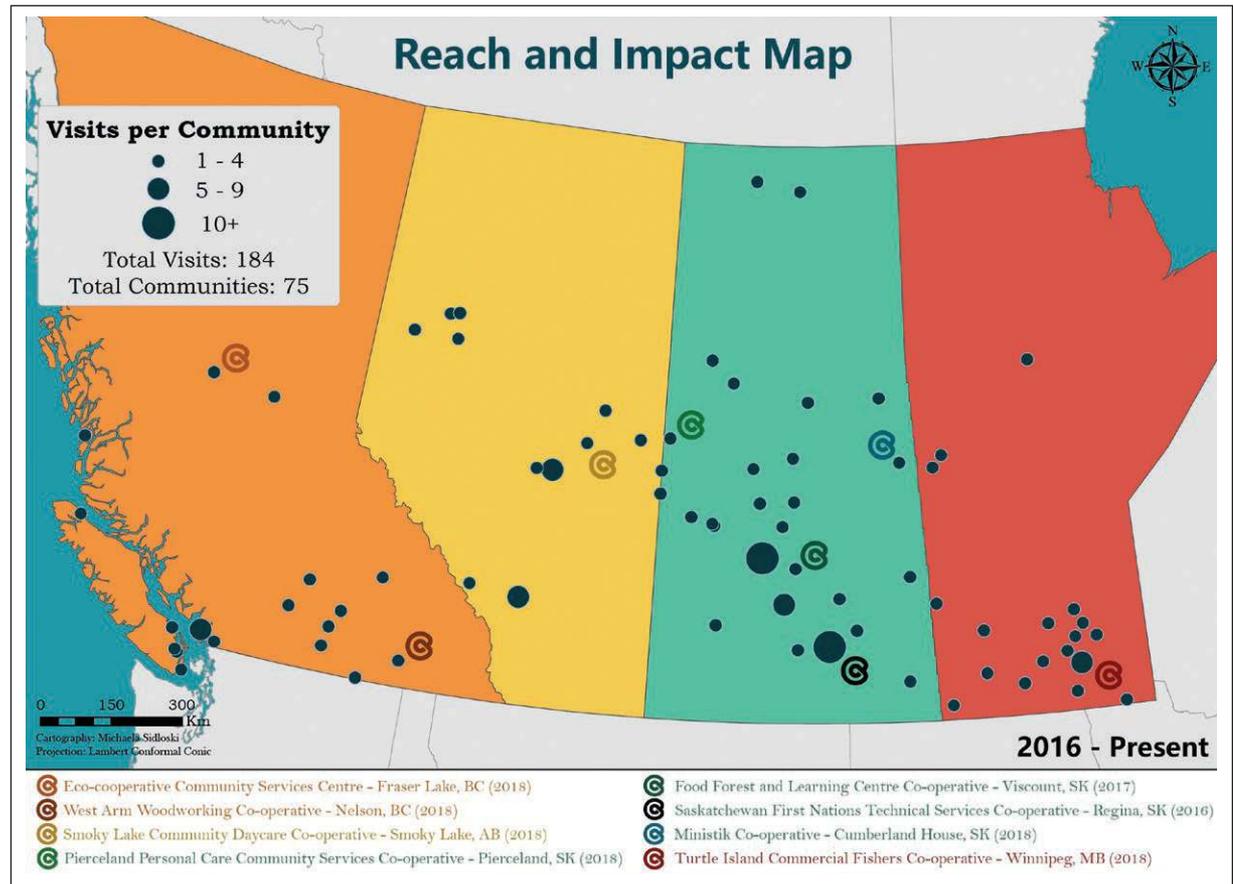


Mandy is the driving force behind *The Gathering Place*, an aspiring food hub co-op in central Alberta. In the face of global competition and economic and political forces out of their control, small farmers are coming together to create their own unique marketplace. Our supports helped the co-op form bylaws, produce a business plan and incorporate. The co-op has secured funding and should have a grand opening the summer of 2019.



PLACES

By the end of 2018, the team at Co-operatives First had made 184 visits to 74 different communities. Now that's going the distance. Along the way, they created 7 insightful Backroad Diaries videos of co-ops making an impact in communities. Plus, they reached hundreds of thousands across western Canada through regular articles and The Common Share podcast, which highlights co-op, community and business leaders doing amazing things to help their communities grow and thrive.





IMPROVING FIRST NATION HOUSING ONE INSPECTION AT A TIME

First Nations in Saskatchewan's Treaty territories are subject to heavy housing regulation from the Canadian federal government.

In fact, CMHC requires no less than six inspections at various points throughout the building process. Each of these is outsourced to a third party, and for years a single company handled all the inspections.

Not surprisingly, the company has neither the capacity nor the understanding of the unique needs of each First Nation community to manage all the work. So, the process of building a house on reserve land is incredibly slow.

Together, we can do better

To improve efficiencies and consistency of this work, First Nation leaders have made increasing the quality of technical services on First Nations a priority. And, in 2015, leaders from a gathering of First Nations and Tribal Councils joined forces to start the Saskatchewan First Nations Technical Services Co-op (now the Indigenous Technical Services Co-op).

The co-op was created to give First Nations control over this vital service, giving them the decision-making power, ability to hire contractors of their choosing, and the benefits of listening to and meeting the needs of member communities.





Tim Isnana

*Executive Director,
Indigenous Technical
Services Co-operative*

An ambitious project

The project is ambitious to say the least. The goal of the co-op is to increase efficiencies, decrease costs and improve quality of these services by being accountable to its shareholder member Nations.

“Essentially the coop provides technical services for housing inspections for First Nation communities, our members,” said Tim Isnana, Executive Director for SFNTSC. “We also provide consulting services for engineering services that relate to housing or public infrastructure in First Nations communities.”

Among the benefits member shareholders get is taking the complex process of applying for funding and making it easier to understand.

“We are open, we’re transparent, and we’re accountable not only to ourselves but to our members,” Isnana said.

Modernising the process

To this end, the co-op has created an open cloud space to house documents, making the application process for Section 95 funding easier.

Isnana said the co-op is essentially building an online library for members to access with the guides, forms, and templates they need. The co-op is also developing a software solution to make paperwork more efficient.

“[This service will cut] the workload of our inspectors almost literally in half,” he said. “And it’ll be done right on-site with pictures embedded in the

document and then sent to us. We basically free up the housing inspector’s time by three to four hours per new house.”

Consider a co-op

Setting up the business as a co-operative was a natural choice, Isnana said, and he would encourage Indigenous communities and organizations to consider the model when looking for solutions.

“I definitely would recommend the co-op model to any other Indigenous organizations that are out there, that are looking to start up a business,” he said.



WHAT DRIVES US

Provide thought leadership

Our mandate is to promote the co-op business model, but also increase awareness and understanding. To do this, we aim to produce interesting stories, share best practices, interview experts and reach new audiences. Through high quality stories and thought leadership, we hope to help budding co-op entrepreneurs and community leaders think about co-ops in new and innovative ways.

Promote and support co-op creation

Besides inspiring ideas and encouraging leadership, we also support co-op entrepreneurs as they work to create new businesses. To do this, we provide guidance and coaching for those who need a little encouragement. For co-op entrepreneurs needing a bit of research or planning, we offer feasibility studies and business plans. And we supply tools and resources to those able to go it alone.

Transform how co-ops are perceived

Reshaping how the co-op model is viewed, understood, talked about and used is a generational process. We can start by dramatically shifting how we frame the model within a rapidly changing world and for a new audience, transforming it into an obvious option to grow communities.

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Co-operatives First
1810 8th Street East
Saskatoon, SK S7H 0T6

CooperativesFirst.com

