

A TIME TO BE



THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDER

The Co-operative Retailing System and Federated Co-operatives Limited have invested millions of dollars into rural and Indigenous communities through innovative sustainability programs. Co-operatives First is very proud to be an example of this ongoing investment.

To call this investment unique

understates the critical role the CRS and FCL play in western Canada. Co-operatives First is just one example of the forward-thinking and innovative ways these foundational entities have been a lifeline, economic powerhouse, and revitalizing force in communities across the prairies and into BC. Besides supporting tens of thousands

of jobs and providing vital services to communities that might not otherwise have them, the CRS and FCL's co-operative legal structure helps ensure their profits genuinely benefit the communities these exceptional businesses serve.

With two women leading these organizations, the launch of the

Western Nations program, and sustainability becoming part of FCL's brand architecture, the **time to be bold** is now. We are very proud to have the opportunity to work alongside these leaders and path makers in ensuring rural and Indigenous communities in western Canada continue to grow and thrive.

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Uncertainty and instability remained a theme throughout 2021. In times like these, we believe it is more important than ever to work together and find ways to solve these challenges cooperatively. And for those in the co-op community promoting the co-operative model, this instability and uncertainty offer us an opportunity. So, it's also time to be bold.

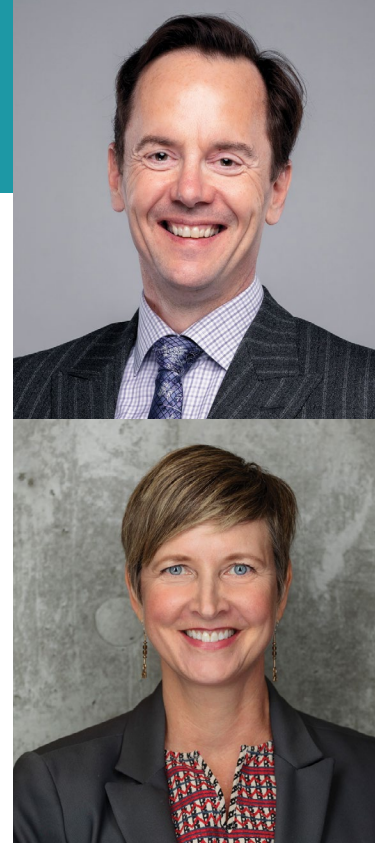
To be bold sometimes means becoming uncomfortable, vulnerable even. This year, we challenged people through the *Hometown Advantage* campaign to seek out opportunities for community-building and economic growth by taking an inventory of their community's assets instead of listing its negatives. We also hosted leaders from Indigenous and municipal partnerships through very well-attended webinars to learn from them and inspire others to try something new and spark more positive relationships with their neighbours.

This year, we also launched the *Your Way, Together* campaign. Through this outreach and engagement effort, our Guide to Indigenous co-operative development was downloaded over 100 times on the launch date alone. Since then, we have taken bold steps towards better engaging Indigenous audiences and working towards truth and reconciliation.

Besides sparking these critical and complex conversations, one of the year's highlights has been the amazingly innovative ways groups throughout western Canada have – with our support – used the co-op model. This year, we guided groups through forming investment co-ops, a health co-op, a radio co-op, a meat producer co-op, and even a co-operative that connects youth with nature through day camps. In BC, we helped First Nations form a dockworks co-op, and in Saskatchewan, Weyburn's theatre transitioned into a community-owned co-operative business this year with our support. The variety of ideas and collaboration has been inspiring.

But the true star of the show in 2021 has been the incorporation of an Elder's co-operative in Cote First Nation. Kici Anishinabek Kananakachiwewat Community Service Co-operative was formed to provide the community's youth with traditional cultural and land-based activities, promote healthy and balanced lifestyles, and help preserve the Onakawawin language through educational programming. This small but mighty group of Indigenous Elders is taking charge of the cultural future of their community and is already seeing successes.

We want to thank our funder for providing us with the opportunity to do what we do. Without you, none of this would be possible. We also want to thank the board of directors for their wisdom, insights, and direction. And finally, we would like to thank the staff. We know this year was challenging. But you stuck with us and not only survived but thrived within these difficult times.



Warm regards,

Sheldon Stener
Board Chair of
Co-operatives First,
General Counsel and
Corporate Secretary, Legal
Compliance and Governance,
Federated Co-operatives Limited

Audra Krueger
Executive Director for
Co-operatives First

WHAT WE DID

ADVANCING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our bold goal in 2021 was to ensure our clients and participants have the best possible experience learning from us and accessing our materials and resources. Through our online platforms, live workshops and webinars, and one-on-one support, we streamlined and improved the journey our learners take to get accurate and engaging information on co-ops.

In collaboration with our partners at the Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, we improved the *Good Governance Matters* online course by adding weekly Zoom sessions for participants to discuss the material. This change made the course more interactive and valuable for participants. Over 60 co-op and credit union leaders joined our 2021 cohort to increase their knowledge about co-op governance.



Our team connected with over 70 economic development professionals by delivering *Creating Connections* workshops. These unique online, accredited workshops introduce the co-op model to this critical group of stakeholders. *Creating Connections* builds a community of practice, making co-ops part of the conversation in the professional economic development community. The workshop is now

accredited by four economic development associations, including the Canadian Association of Management Consultants, bringing even more value to EDOs.

We also delivered four *Board Basics* workshops to clients. This hands-on guidance helps people new to co-ops better understand their roles and responsibilities. The workshop aims to set new co-ops and their boards

up for success by providing one-on-one support to ensure they are “operations-ready.”

Our team also partnered with the Government of Canada to upgrade our *Co-ops in Canada* course with fact sheets, updated statistics, and reworked case studies, making it even more relevant and accessible for frontline federal employees.

CREATING CO-OPS AND INSPIRING RURAL LEADERS

Another bold goal of ours in 2021 was to inspire rural people to think positively about their communities and equip them to seize opportunities to make their towns vibrant, thriving places. To do this, our team launched the *Hometown Advantage* campaign. This campaign highlighted the idea that small towns and rural regions have what they need to thrive – but sometimes it takes coming together and positive thinking to use their resources and create growth opportunities.

The campaign features seven videos encouraging rural people to think about using their local assets to their advantage and how forming a co-operative might help. We kicked off the campaign with a social media contest that asked people to share what makes their town unique places to live, work, and play. And to incentivize participation, we offered folks the chance to

win a \$500 Co-op gift card.

Hometown Advantage also features an e-book and webinar series for Economic Development Officers to inspire them to add co-operatives to their local development toolkit.

Throughout 2021, we hosted five *Hometown Advantage* webinars, which were attended by 150 economic developers from western Canada. Each webinar highlighted examples of regular people coming together to make their communities awesome. To help make the examples tangible, we also invited guests with experience in raising funds for community projects, organizing community partners to build something new for their community, or finding ways to spark innovative local projects. The webinars were very popular with economic developers. The unique platform and topics created a safe, familiar space for these professionals, who often work alone, to find comradery and share experiences.

To complement these webinars, our team also piloted a

collaborative webinar series called “Regional Synergies” that features innovative and inspiring rural or municipal and Indigenous partnerships.

We also launched the “3 Good Ideas” newsletter, which delivers

curated monthly resources to economic developers, and held a series of Facebook Live conversations with consultant James Grieve about business planning and other important factors involved in business start-ups.



INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

In 2021 our team made bold steps towards our goal of increasing the number of Indigenous co-operatives in western Canada.

At an exclusive online event in March 2021, we launched the *Your Way, Together* campaign. Led by Indigenous Relations Lead Trista Pewapisconias, this campaign reflected Co-operatives First's commitment to Indigenous peoples and

their communities and set the stage for a conversation.

Indigenous communities are vibrant, growing, and actively exploring opportunities to prosper. But Indigenous people don't tackle problems and seize opportunities alone – they do it together, as individuals and as communities. One way to work together is by using the co-operative model. *Your Way, Together* aimed to inspire Indigenous peoples and communities to explore the model and how it might benefit them.

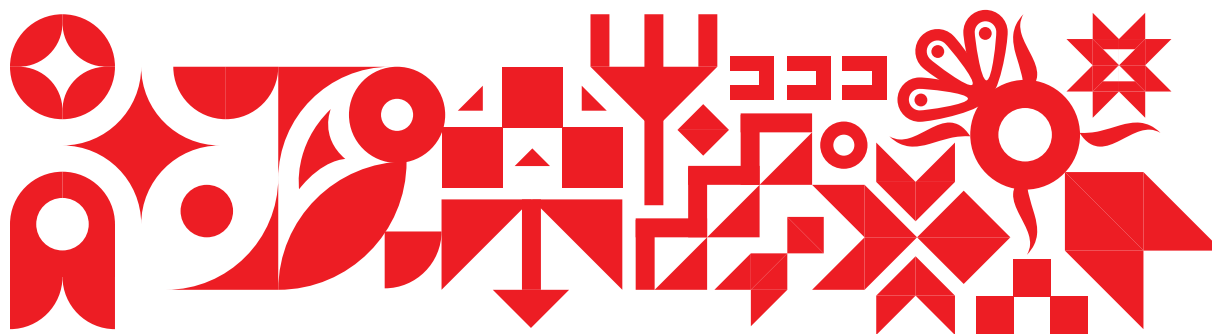
The launch of *Your Way, Together* included an e-book guide to creating a business on a First Nation, a website

that highlights Indigenous co-op success stories, a webinar series, and more.

Indigenous designer Tim Neal created the visual elements of the campaign, including a beautiful representation of the art of tribes from the west coast Salish to the Ojibwe in Manitoba. We've used this mosaic map of western Canada on social media, our website, advertising,

hoodies, and other merchandise.

We also hosted three *Your Way, Together* webinars in 2021, featuring topics from artist co-operatives to Indigenous agriculture and small business collaborations. To complement this series, we also started the "Regional Synergies" webinar series, which highlights municipal-Indigenous partnerships.



CLIENT STORY

STORY CREDIT:

Kelsey No Runner, *Eaglefeather News*, June 13, 2022

COTE FIRST NATION ELDERS CREATE A CO-OP TO PRESERVE LANGUAGE AND TRADITIONS

Faced with the reality of losing their most precious resource, Elders and Knowledge Keepers from Cote First Nation took matters into their own hands.

In the heart of southern Saskatchewan on Treaty 4 Territory, the Onakawawin language is becoming harder to hear in the conversations between Cote First Nation members. This loss of Onakawawin is because of colonization and Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and can be detrimental to the way of life and traditions of the Saulteaux people.

“Without the language and without the culture, there can be no ceremony,” said Elder Wanda Cote. “You can’t perform the ceremonies in English. We’re trying to preserve the language to carry on our culture

and our traditions. We’re given that language by the Creator to pass on to our children.”

Through the collaboration of community Elders and support from the Yorkton Tribal Council, Kici Anishinabek Kananakachiwewat Community Service Co-operative was developed. By working together for the advancement of future generations, they are challenging the forces that tried to erase who they are as an Indigenous community.

The Elder-led co-op translates to “Elderly Knowledge Keepers Community Services Co-operative” and is based on the goals of the seven founding members. Elder Madeline Whitehawk is using the strength of her life experience as an IRS survivor and former educator of 50 years to empower the work the co-operative is creating.

“I was raised in the forest, and I lived in harmony with nature. I speak the language fluently,” said Whitehawk. “I have a linguistics background, and throughout

my years I’ve gained knowledge on curriculum development and language development.

“We often hear our leadership say we have to preserve our language, but nobody has really done anything. As Elders, we got together this summer and asked, ‘Well, what can we do?’ We want to do something now.”

Each co-op member brings invaluable expertise to the group, including community service, traditional knowledge and culture preservation. The co-op will carry out traditional cultural and land-based activities, promote healthy and balanced lifestyles, and provide education about the Onakawawin language.



WHERE WE'RE GOING IN 2022



REGIONAL SYNERGIES

Rural and Indigenous people have a shared history. So, as part of our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and in recognition of our unique mandate, we are taking steps to encourage better understanding between these neighbouring communities and increase awareness among their leadership.

Our first step has been to create a webinar series focused on successful partnerships between rural and Indigenous communities. We called this series “Regional Synergies.”

The first of these webinars took place in late 2021. The guests were from South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP). SIPP is an alliance of over 70 public and private-sector partners in Greater Victoria, including 11 local governments, nine First Nations, three post-secondary institutions, nine industry associations and nonprofits, and more than 30 major employers. SIPP’s goal is to bolster the region’s economic and social prosperity. To do this,

they create high-quality, household-sustaining jobs so that more families can afford to live, work and build a life in the region.

We hope to encourage more innovative partnerships between communities so that both thrive and grow. And one way to form alliances, of course, is through the co-operative model.

INDIGENOUS AWARENESS TRAINING

The second step we’re taking on our Truth and Reconciliation journey is developing an online Indigenous Awareness Training course.

With support from a well-established Indigenous Awareness trainer, we hope to create a space for rural participants to ask questions without judgement, learn at a pace that suits them, and deliver the content with the honesty and respect the subject deserves.

A better understanding of each other’s ways of being and histories is another way to explore opportunities for partnership and working together. And knowing where someone is coming from, under what circumstances, and what impact that has had on them better prepares people’s expectations – especially in business dealings.

Our goal is to prepare people to be bold, step outside their comfort zone, and work together. Because together is better, and for many rural communities, partnership with their neighbours is the only way forward.





TEAM UP ON A START-UP

Throughout 2021, we have been developing the Intro to Co-ops course. In 2022, it will launch, and the additional modules will be created.

We designed the course pedagogy with a micro-learning framework, like Udemy or other adult learning platforms. This strategy means people can learn at their own pace, like most online learning, but also through short modular lessons. So, participants can complete a module during a coffee break or a few minutes of downtime.

The modules are fun and primarily visual, and every module covers one topic or concept.

The course offers pathways for a variety of learners, including people who want to start a co-op, people who are currently involved in a co-op, and more.

We also hope to use the course as a way of making clients “investment ready.” By this, we mean helping groups better understand the type of business they are forming, some of the regulations they will encounter, how others have worked together to do the same, and why it’s essential to find alignment at the outset. For some groups, completing the course may be a requirement before we invest in a business plan or feasibility study for them.

The campaign we will launch to support the micro-course is called “Team up on a start-up.” It will target people searching for information or resources in their business development start-up phase. We hope to encourage entrepreneurs to choose the co-operative model, especially those who may already collaborate with a few friends or peers.

Because we set the micro-course up like LinkedIn Learning, Skillshare or Udemy, self-driven learners and doers will be familiar with the format and gain insight into the model and its benefits for collaborating entrepreneurs.



A RETURN TO NORMAL

The past two years have disrupted regular business practices around the world. The result has shifted how organizations prioritize travel and in-person events. In time, a blend of in-person and online meetings and conferences will be the norm, and we anticipate it to begin in earnest in 2022.

With that in mind, we have plans to return to presenting and hosting tradeshow booths across western Canada. Two big ones for us are the Economic Developers of Alberta conference in Kananaskis and the CANDO national conference at Whitecap Dakota First Nation. But at the same time, we are leveraging the efficiencies of online meetings and conferences to be lean and effective in this new way of doing business.

Each event we attend, whether online or in-person, brings our team in contact with hundreds of rural and Indigenous economic developers and provides us opportunities for presenting the co-op model, showing the potential value this unique model offers these communities and educating economic development professionals so they can spot a possible co-op and support its development.

Building these relationships and connections is critical to promoting the model and creating a better understanding of its value to rural and Indigenous communities.



INVESTMENTS AND EXPENDITURES

In 2021, the ongoing challenges in the world impacted how and where we were able to invest. Increased online service delivery and a growing need for better digital security meant we invested in online architecture and support. These investments mean we can go forward into our new hybrid workday confidently and safely. It also means our clients and online participants' information is secure and safe.

Where we decreased spending on travel and events, we chose to increase investment in online courses and create a better online learning infrastructure. Likewise, in the interest of maintaining engagement with critical stakeholders despite being unable to meet in person, we invested in webinars, engagement campaigns, and even direct mail advertising.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

PROJECTS

- 146** co-operative projects since 2016
- 57** co-operatives incorporated since 2016
- 15** new co-operative projects this year
- 13** co-operatives incorporated this year

PRODUCTS

- 5** Creating Connections workshops for economic developers
- 6** Explore meetings, one organizational design session, and four Board Workshops, which help new start-ups organize and make better decisions
- 1** cohort of the Good Governance Matters online course for co-operative business leaders across western Canada

REACH

- 1231** leads (prospective new clients or partners)
- Reached **1.084M** through social media platforms (14% increase YoY)
- 106K** website visits (up 58% YoY)

CONVERSATIONS

- 9** Podcast episodes on various co-op topics with amazing guests like Chief Darcy Bear, Senator Marty Klyne, and Stocksy United CEO Mike Cook. The podcast also surpassed the **10,000** downloads milestone in 2021.
- 9** webinars providing space for discussions on topics as varied as Indigenous business development to how economic developers can raise investment dollars. We had from **20** to **80** people sign up for each of these dynamic conversations.
- 21** new articles on topics of interest to rural and Indigenous leaders and co-op entrepreneurs and practitioners everywhere. Our top article had over **15,000** views in 2021.

\$1,024,211 TOTAL REVENUE



49% CO-OP EDUCATION

35% CO-OP DEVELOPMENT

16% ADMINISTRATION COSTS

BOARD

CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Sheldon Stener
*General Counsel and
Corporate Secretary,
Legal Compliance and Governance,
Federated Co-operatives Limited*



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*Director of Indigenous Relations
at Farm Credit Canada*

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Trista Pewapisconias
Indigenous Engagement Lead



Heather Hallgrimson
Business Development Lead



Kyle White
Education and Governance Lead



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