

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDER

The Co-operative Retailing System (CRS) and Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) are part of the lifeblood of western Canada. Without Co-op locations dotted across the prairies and into BC many communities would lack the basic services they need to thrive. The CRS and FCL understand the needs of the communities in which they operate, which is why they've so generously invested in Co-operatives First. By creating this organization they have helped residents of rural and Indigenous communities capitalize on opportunities to keep their economies vibrant. Without the CRS and FCL, the thousands of people we have reached over the years would not know about the importance of co-operatives and how transformative they can be. We thank these vital institutions for their ingenuity in creating our organization, their ongoing support of what we do, and their belief in the people of western Canada.

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The past few years have been a time of change – of adjusting to new realities and norms, reacting quickly to emerging situations, and ensuring we maintain our high standards of product and service delivery despite arising challenges.

At the end of 2022, we found we had not only been able to manage the challenges of the global pandemic, we also emerged a stronger, more efficient, more agile organization.

The way we do things has fundamentally changed. In the past we traveled extensively around western Canada to present to and work with groups or economic development organizations. However, over the past few years we built up our online capacity, capitalized on people's increased comfort level with online meetings and webinars, and refined our processes to efficiently capture the potential of remote start-up support.

As a result, we can now be more strategic and efficient in how we deliver support.

In 2022 we launched a key component of our educational

and outreach strategy: the Introduction to Co-ops course. Hosted on our own Learning Management System, this online course is a way for anyone to learn about co-ops — for free, and at their own pace. Created by our team, the course brings together all our experience and knowledge and presents it in an engaging, accessible format. Now, more people have access to our resources and insights whenever they want them, adding value for them and creating efficiencies for us.

Not only have we strengthened our core business, we're expanding the kind of supports we offer. In 2022 we had the opportunity to welcome Cathy Edwards as our Entrepreneurin-Residence. With extensive experience creating businesses and organizations, Cathy will create new products that will support clients past the start-up phase to ensure their co-ops thrive.

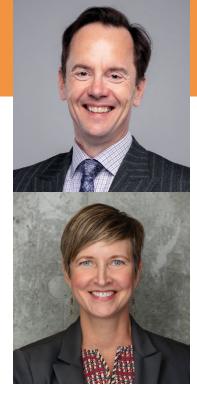
Of course, all our efforts culminate in the goal of seeing more co-operatives in western Canada. In 2022 our clients continued to show how innovative and ambitious people can be with the co-op model. Clients who created new co-ops included groups of artists, bicycle enthusiasts, wellness practitioners, food producers, and archeologists. We helped groups add vital infrastructure to their communities, like daycare centers and local investment mechanisms.

Without the steadfast support of our funder, Federated Cooperatives Limited and the Co-operative Retailing System, we would not be able to build creative products and solutions, adapt to a changing environment, and continue to help groups of motivated, innovative people improve the fabric of western Canada. We thank them for their ongoing faith in us.

Thank you to our Board of Directors, whose dedication and strategic leadership consistently strengthen our organization.

The strategic planning process they undertook in the summer and fall of 2022 provided us with a clear and ambitious five-year plan that ensures we will continue to grow and improve.

And of course, thank you to our staff who has weathered the past few years with determination and



optimism. Their dedication to the work of Co-operatives First fuels our ability to keep supporting the people of western Canada.

Warm regards,

Sheldon Stener K.C.
Board Chair for Co-operatives
First and General Counsel
and Corporate Secretary,
Federated Co-operatives Limited

Audra Krueger Executive Director for Co-operatives First

RE-EMERGING, STRONGER

In 2022 we were thrilled to get back on the road to connect with people in person. From attending conferences and giving presentations and workshops, to getting out to visit clients and hear their stories, it's been refreshing to build personal connections without a computer screen.

Though facing the pandemic was

a challenge, our team buckled down and thought innovatively, and Co-operatives First was able to evolve in new and positive ways. The work we've put in to move our resources and services online has paid off. Now that people are more comfortable holding Zoom meetings and attending webinars, and we have adapted our materials to be consumed online, we have the

flexibility to travel when it makes sense and reach more clients and audiences without getting in a car or on a plane. It's a great mix of personal connections, efficiencies, and scale.

Additionally, when hiring consultants to write feasibility studies and business plans, our choices are no longer restricted by their proximity to

clients. Because they can work together remotely, we now choose the business expert who is the best fit for the project, regardless of where they live.

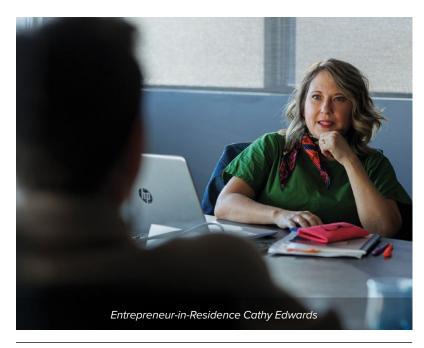
Being more streamlined in our process and products has allowed us to expand the way we think about our services. We welcomed Cathy Edwards, who has written incredible business plans for

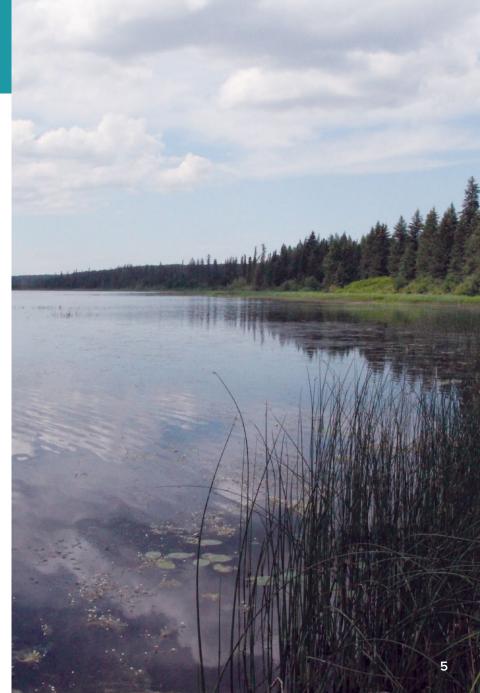




our clients in the past, to join our team as the Entrepreneurin-Residence. Cathy has backgrounds in law, accounting, and entrepreneurship, and hit the ground running to create resources for groups starting daycare co-operatives. Cathy will develop additional products to help clients write grants and find financing opportunities for their co-ops.

We are always improving our process to make it more efficient, user-friendly, and aligned with client needs. The more projects we do, the more we see common threads and create responsive products. As a result of our work over the past few years, we have a clearer sense of who we are, what we do, and how we add value to the lives of rural and Indigenous people across western Canada.





WHAT WE DID



EDUCATION

In 2022 we continued to expand our resources and reach online. The past few years have taught us the importance of making good, clear information available to people wherever they are, and inspired us to create new and exciting online materials.

With our custom Learning Management System (LMS) at our disposal, we created the Introduction to Co-operatives course – a free, video-based course that introduces people to the co-op model and its potential. Written, filmed, and edited in-house, the course allows people to learn at their own pace through video lessons featuring our expert team.

We launched the course in March. with three introductory modules and an additional certificate. pathway for people interested in starting a co-operative. This Co-op Entrepreneur certificate leads people through the basics of incorporating and starting to plan a business. In October, our second certificate course was released. This option — the Co-op Professional certificate - encourages co-op members, staff, and directors to think about key aspects of their own positions, and how they can work together effectively.

Introduction to Co-ops is a hub for all our great content. Participants have commented not only on the high quality of the course, but the extensive supplementary tools, resources, blog posts, podcasts, and other materials – all created by us, and hosted on the Co-operatives First website.

By the end of the year, 611 people had enrolled in the Introduction

"The Good Governance Matters course...provided me with an opportunity to hear from different types of cooperatives from all over Canada and I gained a greater sense of understanding around cooperative values and how they relate and weave together with good governance practices. The course moderators provided insightful perspectives and examples throughout that built on the shared experiences of the cohort. Useful follow up information was provided after each session which allowed me to dig into topics further, reflect on discussions and look for opportunities to enhance my governance practices. Thoroughly enjoyed my experience and would recommend it for anyone involved in a cooperative organization in Canada, regardless of your role."

Rachel Carswell

Governance Manager at Vancity Credit Union

"I have been employed for a Co-op for 35 years and this course gave me insight on how to better educate my team, so in turn, they can better educate & engage our members."

Co-op Professional course participant

to Co-ops course, with 344 receiving at least one certificate of completion. Ninety-seven per cent of participants reported that they enjoyed the course.

But we're not stopping there. We have plans for new modules that appeal to new audiences – all with the goal of educating people about co-ops and encouraging participants to start them.

Not only did we create new educational options, we continued to provide and improve upon our existing ones. We held four Creating Connections workshops attended by 48 economic development professionals interested in how the co-op model could give their communities a boost. We also held an interactive cohort of the Good Governance Matters course in which 35 co-op leaders earned a certificate. And we held 13 webinars on both rural and Indigenous issues that reached 682 people. We've branched out into new ways of sharing information about co-ops - like making short informational videos - and continued with our long-standing ones – like releasing the 50th episode of our podcast.

INSPIRING RURAL COMMUNITIES

We know co-operatives can be an ideal solution for people in small towns to get access to goods and services they want. But rural residents are often unfamiliar with the co-op model and how to use it to reach their goals.

That's why in 2022 we created more ways to get our audiences to think about what their communities need, what they already have, and how they can use a co-op to make things better.

Throughout the year we provided webinars that covered a range of topics on economic and community development. From topics like fostering rural innovation and creating local tourism to local investment opportunities and how arts and culture can support economic development, rural participants received fresh, creative ideas to use in their own communities.

In conjunction with the launch of our Introduction to Co-ops course, we ran the "Team up on a Start-up" contest

to encourage our audience to consider starting a co-operative. To enter, contestants submitted their idea for a co-op they wanted to start. We received 43 entries and chose three winners that proposed the most viable and beneficial businesses: a daycare co-operative and a community project co-operative in Saskatchewan, and a green burial funeral co-op in Manitoba. The three winners received our full slate of products and services: one-on-one support with a Co-operatives First team member, free incorporation, and a business plan from one of our expert business consultants. The breadth of the entries we received showed the creativity of people across western Canada, and we intend to repeat this contest annually.

In June we ran a social media contest called "Show Us Your Assets" that encouraged participants to share great things their communities have to offer. People submitted over 250 entries, posting photos and stories on

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram about why they love their communities and the assets they can use to their advantage. Three randomly chosen entries won \$500 Co-op gifts cards to use wherever they live in western Canada.

By leveraging our online presence, engaging our audiences, and inviting experts and practitioners to share their insights, we've inspired communities to try new things and get things done.





EXPANDING INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS

We strive to strengthen our connections to, and understanding of, Indigenous peoples and communities across western Canada and beyond. Our focus in 2022 was to deepen our knowledge of and connection with Métis peoples in western Canada. We hired a summer student to conduct research about Métis communities, governance, and economic development. With this information, we're formulating a new strategy for reaching people in this important demographic.

We were also excited to start a new relationship with Danielle Levine, a Métis business educator, program designer, and facilitator. Danielle will create a strategy for us to expand our relationships with Indigenous communities in BC, to create awareness about the potential of co-operatives.

To grow and actively engage our Indigenous audience, we launched the Your Way, Together Facebook group. Director of Indigenous Relations, Trista Pewapisconias, manages the group where she starts conversations about co-op success stories and uses of the co-op structure. We held an online "ask us anything" contest to encourage our Indigenous audience to learn more about co-ops, and webinars that covered topics like economic reconciliation.

We were also a key partner in a cross-border project to develop training for Native American co-op developers. The Native Communities Cooperative Development training project was created by a team who recognized co-op development training has historically been taught from a colonial lens. The project has demonstrated the importance of providing training that is built by and for the communities it serves.

A dozen participants from several Native American communities took part in weekly classes that covered topics like building trust, facilitation, cultural dynamics, and values around money. Several classes were taught by our Director of Indigenous Relations and utilized Cooperatives First's educational resources. Students learned how to organize a steering committee, how to map the physical, natural, social, and economic assets of their communities. and the basics of the cooperative business structure.

In all these ways, we've not only become a stronger organization more equipped to meet the needs of Indigenous entrepreneurs across our region, we've helped others grow their capacity as well.

LAUNCHING CO-OPS

Of course, helping people start co-operative businesses is the heart of what we do. We've built all our courses, resources, materials, relationships, and outreach efforts with the goal of seeing more co-ops across western Canada. As always, people surprised us with their innovative and bold ideas for starting businesses that improve their lives and build their communities. We helped groups start daycare co-ops, an investment co-op, and co-ops that address food security. We also helped groups of archeologists, bike enthusiasts, and janitors to start unique co-ops. Our clients consistently prove the versatility and effectiveness of the co-operative model.

In 2022 we set the goal of supporting the start-up of 12 co-operatives, and we exceeded that goal by ultimately helping 13 co-ops to incorporate.

CLIENT FEATURES

SHAUNAVON OPPORTUNITY FUND COOPERATIVE

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan were struggling. Many small businesses couldn't find financing options that met their needs.

The Shaunavon Economic Development Committee, which represents the prairie community of around 1,700 residents, thought an investment co-op could help give business owners a boost. By creating a fund in which local people can invest, the co-op could lend those funds to small businesses for things like start-up costs, equipment, renovations, and expansions. The businesses get the money they need, and local contributors see a return on their investment.

Co-operatives First helped them to start the Shaunavon Opportunity Fund Cooperative the first investment co-op in the province. Lauren Johnson, the Town's Economic Development Officer, said they hope the investment co-op will attract new businesses in addition to supporting existing ones.

PATHWAYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL CO-OPERATIVE

We've started some unique businesses in our time, but sometimes we're still surprised like when a group of archeologists came to us to start a co-op.

This group was interested in transitioning a consulting

services business to a worker cooperative to continue their work in the Kootenay region of British Columbia. The co-operative conducts archaeological overview assessments, which compile knowledge about archaeological site locations, historical First Nations' land use, and cultural and environmental conditions that may affect these sites. Its members have experience working in various industries, including mining, hydroelectric, forestry, and municipal and provincial government.



"Working with Co-operatives First was incredible! The group helped us through every step of the long journey. Each member of their team is so knowledgeable and each one of them played an important role in making our co-op a success!"

Lauren Johnson

WHERE WE'RE GOING IN 2023



Looking forward, we have more big ideas that will continue to strengthen our organization, and communities across western Canada.

Our innovative team has plans to develop new products that will help our clients thrive past the initial start-up phase. This includes resources to help clients apply for financing and grants and develop a communications plan to get their message out. We'll also continue to research start-up barriers that we could help clients overcome. A key focus will be helping groups capitalize on government funding for daycares by promoting and supporting the start-up of daycare co-ops.

We will release the online Indigenous Awareness Training course, built in partnership with well-known Indigenous trainers John Lagimodiere and Winston McLean. The course will be a space for participants to learn at their own pace and ask questions without judgement. Our goal is to prepare people in co-ops to work together by helping

them understand Indigenous history and knowledge.

We are also creating a certified professional development course for lawyers in western Canada. The course will introduce legal professionals to co-ops and the relevant regulatory frameworks. The goal is to equip lawyers with the information they need to support co-ops and identify when a co-operative is the appropriate business solution for their clients.

Led by our Director of Entrepreneurship, in 2023 we'll conduct research in partnership with Rural on Purpose, an organization headed by Mary Doyle. We have engaged a group of over 20 economic development practitioners from across western Canada to create scenarios that will give us a deep understanding of issues, obstacles, and opportunities in rural communities.

In addition to all the ways we have grown and strengthened Co-operatives First, we continue to innovate, learn, and improve our ability to serve the people of western Canada.



2022 HIGHLIGHTS

PROJECTS

173 co-operative projects since 2016

69 co-operatives incorporated since 2016

27 new co-operative projects in 2022

13 co-operatives incorporated in 2022

PRODUCTS

4 Creating Connections workshops for economic developers

13 webinars on a variety of topics including senior housing, business succession, and co-ops' role in reconciliation

4 Explore meetings, 5 Board Basics Workshops, and 1 cohort of the Good Governance Matters course

10 business plans and feasibility studies

611 participants enrolled in the Introduction to Co-ops course

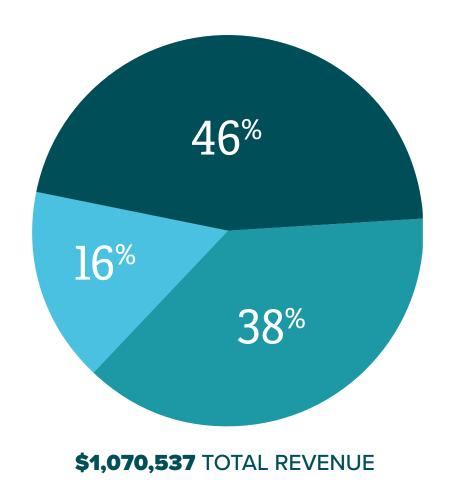
REACH

1,831 leads (prospective new clients or partners)

26 events attended (in-person and Zoom)

Reached over 960,000 people through social media platforms

121,000 website visits



CO-OP EDUCATION

- **672** students in online courses
- **48** economic developers completed accredited workshop
 - 9 new online modules launched
- **121K** website visits
- 960K reached through social media

DEVELOPING NEW CO-OPS

- **27** active projects
- **10** business plans and feasibility studies
- **13** new co-ops

ADMINISTRATION COSTS

BOARD

CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Sheldon Stener K.C.
General Counsel and
Corporate Secretary at
Federated Co-operatives Limited



Shaun Soonias Director of Indigenous Relations at Farm Credit Canada



Eric Moes Co-founder and Owner of Little Fork Ranch

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Nicole Woelke Manager, Data Intelligence at Cambrian Credit Union



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and Past President of the
Canadian Co-operative Assoc.



Julie Breuer
Vice President,
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Communications at Central 1

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Audra Krueger
Executive Director



Trista PewapisconiasDirector of Indigenous Relations



Heather Hallgrimson *Director of Entrepreneurship*



Kyle WhiteDirector of Education



Aasa MarshallDirector of Communications



Cathy Edwards *Entrepreneur-in-Residence*



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