Capacity Building in Rural and Indigenous Communities
Presentation Outline

• What is Co-operatives First
• Context of rural western Canada
• Origins of Co-operatives First
• What we do
• Questions
What is Co-operatives First?

• A New Non-Profit Organization: Mission: Inspiring Rural And Indigenous Communities Across Western Canada To Build Co-operatives That Thrive

• Co-operatives First was formed in response to new conditions in the rural west and hard truths in Indigenous Communities
Rural Western Canada is undergoing rapid change:

- Traditional economies are shifting
- Agriculture is highly mechanized and other industries are growing in importance
- People travel further over longer distances to access goods and services
- Rural change and population shift, and the growth of rural “hub” communities
• Bust/boom cycles of resource economies have created insecurity

• Governments (federal and provincial) are loading more responsibility to the municipal level, while municipalities merge. Grant funding is changing.

• Demographics are more fluid as new populations move into rural regions to fill labour shortages
For Indigenous peoples, change is not happening fast enough

- The legacy of colonization and ongoing racism continues to exclude Indigenous peoples from participating in the economy
- Paternalism and institutionalized isolation has prevented economic, social and human capacity building on many reserves
- Co-op developers who were historically active in rural communities typically did not work with Indigenous peoples
Rural vibrancy and wellbeing

- Rural communities have been losing services and amenities
  - Indigenous peoples, in many cases, never had them in the first place – Indigenous reserves have been likened to Third World countries

- Long history of using the co-op model in an international development context (Canadian Co-operative Association)
  - *so why not more in western Canada?*

- **Question:** How do we build capacity for more co-op development in rural and Indigenous communities in western Canada?
Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP)

• Research project underway mid 2014 through 2015

• Conducted by Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, JSGS, ICNGD and the Plunkett Foundation

• On behalf of the Co-operative Retailing System (CRS), Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) provided funding
Research Questions:

• Is the Co-operative model feasible in Rural and Indigenous communities in Western Canada?

• If so, what is needed to inspire rural and indigenous communities to explore and create co-ops that thrive?
Top ten needs from 26 community engagement events:

1. Health Care
2. Housing
3. Support Services
4. Industry and business development
5. Community barriers
6. Senior's Services
7. Transportation
8. Accessing services
9. Volunteerism
10. Recreation
When asked: “Do you know what a co-operative is?”
22% of rural residents and 41% of Aboriginal residents said ‘No.’
(Some) Critical findings for co-op development in western Canada

**Issue**

- Co-op knowledge is lacking
- Disconnect between community needs and co-op solutions
- Data on co-operatives is lacking
- Indigenous co-op knowledge requires special support, training

**Solution**

- Insert co-op knowledge
- Host community events to inspire co-operative solutions
- Invest in data gathering
- Support increased focus on specific requirements for Indigenous co-ops

More findings are available at coopinnovation.wordpress.com.
Co-operatives First believes that ‘co-op development’ is more than developing one co-op at a time. It is about developing co-op knowledge and embedding it across the whole co-op business environment.
But how do we put this model into action?

- Inspire
- Explore
- Create
- Thrive
Inspire: Open Community events to link community needs to co-operative solutions

Public Meetings
Logistics
Facilitation

Community buy-in
What is missing, what is needed?
Have your say

Report
Mirror ideas/research
Next steps
Explore: dig deeper into a particular need, find its parameters and possibilities

**One need, many answers**
What is the issue? How best should you solve it?
Who should lead?

**Community buy-in**
Is a co-op right for your community?
Strengths and challenges

**Report**
Research
Next steps
Create: Pathfinding to build co-operatives

Pathfinding
Guidance, support, and building a Co-op development team for communities/groups

Co-op knowledge
Insert co-ops into business and Economic development arenas

Create opportunities
New ways to use the co-operative business model
**Thrive: Help existing co-ops to thrive and grow**

- **Community Check-up**
  Help a co-op reconnect with their community

- **Co-op check-in**
  Help a co-op through renewal

- **Regional co-op community review**
  Events for multiple regional co-ops to address co-op issues
Communicating the co-op model in new ways to new audiences

- **Sole proprietorships**
 SOLE PROPRIETORSHIPS
  Sole proprietorships are the simplest business structure. Find out why you should (or shouldn't) structure your business as a sole proprietorship.

- **Partnerships**
  PARTNERSHIPS
  Learn about the advantages and disadvantages of partnerships, limited partnerships, and limited liability partnerships.

- **Corporations**
  CORPORATIONS
  Corporations have rights and responsibilities similar to individuals. Find out how a corporate business structure will affect you, and why you should (or shouldn't) incorporate your business.

Insert Co-operative Business model here
Thank you

- Co-operatives first is funded by federated Co-operatives Limited on behalf of the Co-operative Retailing System.
- We thank them for their commitment to co-operative development