

From: Aasa Marshall <aasa@cooperativesfirst.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 1, 2018 6:59 PM
To: Engages-Mobilisation (WD/DEO) <wd.engages-mobilisation.deo@canada.ca>
Subject: Submission: Western Canada Growth Strategy

Please find attached a submission for the Western Canada Growth Strategy consultation on behalf of Co-operatives First, a non-profit business development organization that specializes in the co-operative model.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

Sincerely,

Aasa Marshall
COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR
306-382-4410



213–310 Wall Street
Saskatoon, SK S7K 1N7
cooperativesfirst.com

Western Canadian Growth Strategy

Submission from Co-operatives First



Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital to the Western economy, with 427,000 SMEs providing employment to over 3.4 million people. At Co-operatives First we believe the co-operative business model is an effective and necessary tool for SME creation in rural and Indigenous communities across Western Canada.

With Motion M-100, the Government of Canada recognized “the important role co-operatives play in the economy” and committed to ensuring they are able to thrive. As a non-profit business development organization created to support the start-up and success of co-ops, we enthusiastically support this motion, and thank the government for bringing attention to co-operatives. With this effort in mind, Co-operatives First submits the following vision for growth in Western Canada.

1. What does a stronger western Canadian economy look like 10 years from now?

A stronger western Canadian economy is one in which rural and Indigenous communities are thriving. Rural areas must have the same access to services as urban centres, from high speed broadband access to sufficient childcare to seniors’ housing. These allow people to stay in rural areas to contribute to the drivers of the western economy, and start and grow businesses.

Co-operatives keep rural and remote economies strong. They are a tool for people to obtain the goods and services they need without government funding or intervention. Co-operatives also last longer than other types of businesses and survive better during times of economic crisis. A healthy, growing economy is therefore one in which the co-op sector is strong.

2. What are the best ways to spur new growth in western Canada?

Rural infrastructure and avenues for local investment are key. Luckily, co-ops can be used to provide both.

Alberta is a hub for co-ops that provide the services rural people need, like water, electricity, gas, and transportation. As rural highspeed internet becomes more important, and as we work to mitigate climate change, co-ops that provide broadband and renewable energy are also being considered and created.

Investment helps communities grow. Community investment co-operatives, like those in Sangudo, Alberta or Creston, BC allow people to invest their money in local businesses. Legislation, therefore, should be supportive of this type of investment.

People are moving to rural areas for the lifestyle, and jobs can be done remotely with the right infrastructure in place. Co-ops can support this type of entrepreneurship: Mountain Co-lab in Revelstoke, uses the co-op model to provide a co-working space for people who move to the community to maintain and pursue their careers.

3. What will help the Indigenous economy continue to grow?

Economic development is growing in Indigenous communities, as is self-employment among Indigenous peoples. Co-operatives provide a governance structure wherein people work together and the benefits are equitably distributed, which often appeals to Indigenous communities. With co-operatives, these communities create business structures that meet their unique needs.



There is a large and growing list of how Indigenous communities can and do use the co-op model. Through the Saskatchewan First Nations Technical Services Co-operative, First Nations communities take on contracts for things like home inspections rather than hire external firms. Northern communities facing food security issues turn to co-operative retail stores and horticulture co-ops in greater numbers. Indigenous fishers are exploring the advantages of working co-operatively: the Manitoba Metis Federation has supported fishers to form a marketing co-op to increase the capacity of that sector.

Harnessing the co-op model provides Indigenous communities with immense opportunities to grow and recirculate wealth in their communities.

3. How can we improve economic participation in the west of underrepresented groups, including women, youth and new immigrants?

The co-op model provides a mechanism for underrepresented groups to create space for themselves in the economy. Worker co-ops create employment, giving workers an equal say in how their business is run and equal share in the profits. Co-ops are also used to provide services for underrepresented groups that might not otherwise be available.

Newcomers have been adept at using the co-op model. As a population that can face barriers to employment (such as language, lack of Canadian work experience or foreign credential recognition), the worker co-op model is a way to gain employment and ownership. Historically newcomers have also benefited from housing, financial, and retail co-operatives.

Co-ops provide a variety of ways for young people to access an otherwise difficult job market. As baby boomer business owners retire and plan their succession, the co-op model provides a way for younger workers with lower access to capital to purchase the business. Young people are using the model to start new businesses as well, from breweries to media and software companies. Providing education about the co-operative model early will get young people thinking about ways they can collaborate to create business opportunities and fulfill local needs.

4. How can governments, industry, and western Canadians work together to grow the regional economy?

When it comes to rural and Indigenous economic development, thinking regionally is important. To create growth that benefits everyone, we need to think about new ways to partner across communities and boundaries.

Government can also help by recognizing that co-ops are a way for people to identify and meet their own local needs, and providing an environment that supports co-operative start-ups. By ensuring legislation is amenable to co-operatives, people in rural and Indigenous communities – who know best what they need and how to make it work – will have an important tool at their disposal.

