



FINAL REPORT

WORKSHOP TO DEVELOP AN INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS CO-OPERATIVE NETWORK

HOSTED BY ARCTIC CO-OP AND FCNQ

SPONSORED BY CASC

JULY, 2025



PREAMBLE

This day-long workshop focused on the development of an International Indigenous Co-operative Network. Hosted by Arctic Co-operatives and La Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ), the event was held on July 7 in Baie-D'Urfé, PQ. The workshop presented the Arctic Co-operatives and FCNQ models of co-operative federation. Participants shared the experience of Indigenous co-operatives and envisioned a new international network. Our planning team reached out through Indigenous and Co-operative networks and welcomed people from across Canada. This was a beginning and we expect that through word of mouth and by following up with a virtual meeting, many more co-operatives will be involved in this Indigenous networking initiative.

The event contributed to the Global International Co-operative Alliance - CCR Research Conference at Institute International des Coopératives Alphonse-et-Dorimène-Desjardins (IICADD), Montreal, July 8-11. The Conference celebrated the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives 2025. This event presented an opportunity to highlight the achievements, similar challenges, and unique circumstances faced by Indigenous co-operatives. Arctic Co-operatives, FCNQ and the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation (CASC) through its Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization Committee, provided a space for dialogue, bringing together researchers and practitioners from Indigenous co-operative communities. The workshop outcomes were presented at a scheduled ICA-CCR Conference roundtable.

¹ The idea for this International workshop came from a meeting that included Mary Nirlungayuk, Judith Harris and members of the Institut Koperasi Malaysia. Datuk Suki Mee, a board member and representative of the Orang Asli suggested this full-day event. In Canada, CMC has focused on establishing a Canadian Indigenous Co-op Network for a number of years.



AGENDA

Qulliq lighting: Inuit traditional lamp

Opening Prayer

Sharing Circle: Brief introductions

Presentations: FCNQ and Arctic Co-operatives

Lunch & Film on FCNQ

Small groups: Appreciative Inquiry into options

Dotmocracy: view flip charts and pick priorities

**Large Sharing Circle: envisioning the mandate of the network
and planning next steps**

Closing: Drumming



PRESENTATIONS FROM FEDERATIONS

The workshop started with an overview of two Canadian Inuit co-operatives, La Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec and Arctic Co-operatives. These co-operative federations support their members by providing access to goods and services that are not otherwise available for their communities —everything from retail stores to transportation.

Ilagiisaq – Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ): A Catalyst for Nunavik’s Growth and Resilience

Sokchiveneath Taing Chhoan, Senior Manager Socio-economic Development

Ilagiisaq – Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ) unites fourteen member co-operatives based in Inuit communities along the Hudson and Ungava coasts of Northern Québec — a region now known as Nunavik. Established in 1967, the federation was founded to strengthen the growing cooperative movement by providing shared resources, strategic support, and collective representation, all guided by the vision Atautsikut / Together – Working to develop as a people, leaving none behind.

More than a federation of retail operations, FCNQ forms the economic and social foundation of

Nunavik, helping communities achieve greater self-reliance while preserving their culture. The organization’s activities cover nearly every aspect of northern life — from grocery and financial services to telecommunications, hotel and tourism operations, fuel distribution, renewable energy projects, and transportation services. The FCNQ and its subsidiaries also invest in essential services for Nunavimmiuts and local organizations in the 14 communities of Nunavik, such as the hotel network, apartments, training centers, etc.

With a workforce of over 2,100 employees, including Inuit and Cree personnel in local and regional roles, FCNQ is the largest non-governmental employer in Nunavik. Its general stores offer up to 95,000 products, from everyday essentials to large equipment, helping to meet the diverse needs of remote communities.

FCNQ’s organizational model combines member co-operatives and subsidiaries, ensuring both local autonomy and network stability. This structure allows profits and expertise to remain within the region while fostering collective growth. The federation also manages several community funds designed to strengthen social and economic resilience:

- **Nunavik Co-operative Development Fund** – Finances construction and infrastructure projects throughout the region.
- **Heritage Fund** – Helps Inuit organizations carry out local projects that have an impact on Nunavimmiut.
- **Education Fund** – Supports the training and development of future Inuit managers in various activities within the cooperative network.
- **Fire Fund** – Provides financial assistance to members affected by fire, reimbursing up to 90% of their cooperative purchases for the current year and 50% of those for the previous year, with no premium required.

By emphasizing solidarity, innovation, and sustainability, FCNQ has become a cornerstone of Nunavik’s self-determination. Its governance, rooted in local leadership and community participation, ensures that decisions and benefits stay close to home.

Today, FCNQ stands as a model of cooperative success in Northern Canada, proving that collective action can drive economic development, social empowerment, and cultural preservation — building a stronger future for Nunavik, together, leaving none behind.

Arctic Co-operatives: Servicing & Empowering diverse Co-Operative Businesses in Canadian Arctic

Mary Nirlungayuk, Vice President, Governance and Member Relations

Arctic Co-operatives is a service federation that is owned and controlled by 33 community-based co-operative businesses that are in Nunavut, Northwest Territories and the Yukon.²

Established as Canadian Arctic Producers, the co-operative (1979) is made up of 33 independent co-operatives. The Federation offers joint purchasing and deliveries of groceries and other merchandise, accounting services, tax planning, payroll and benefits, human



resources, feasibility studies for new lines of business, planning and project management of capital projects, financing for member, co-op inventory and capital assets.

The services include a procurement program and member and public relations. Arctic Co-operatives partners with First Nations Bank which is based in Saskatoon to offer banking kiosks in some of their co-op retail stores.

Membership in Arctic Co-operatives consists of independent co-operative organizations located in communities across the Arctic. For the purposes of democratic representation, the geographic area serviced by Arctic Co-operatives is divided into seven districts and each district elects one director. These seven individuals make up the Board of Directors.³ Each year, the Board of Directors elects its own President and two Vice Presidents from among the Directors. Annual General Meetings are conducted in Inuktitut and English.

Arctic Co-operatives gives back to their community through the Arctic Co-operatives Development Fund. The Co-op hosts large celebrations for patronage dividend day, other supports including community barbeques, donations to campaigns like Lutsel K'e Hide Camp, food security through Second Harvest, and mental health supports.

Being part of a cooperative goes beyond just being a customer – you are also an owner. Your opinion matters, your community benefits, and your involvement is important. The future of local Co-ops depends on future leaders, including youth. Respecting our history and educating the next generation ensures that local Co-ops thrive for years to come, benefiting our communities. We are Members, We are Owners, We are Co-op.

2 <https://arctic-coop.com/>

3 <https://arctic-coop.com/index.php/about-arctic-co-ops/directors/>

4 <https://reviews.canadastop100.com/top-employer-arctic-co-operatives>





SMALL GROUP PROCESS: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry turns the problem-solving approach on its head. It focuses on achievements rather than problems, and seeks to go beyond participation to foster inspiration. It was developed in the early 1990s by David Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve University, primarily to help corporations sharpen their competitive advantage.

Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for purposeful change that identifies the best of “what is” to pursue dreams and possibilities of “what could be.” It is a co-operative search for the strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system—those factors that hold the potential for inspired, positive change.

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle is a method for positive change that focuses on identifying and amplifying strengths rather than fixing weaknesses. It involves four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (or Delivery).

RESULTS OF SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

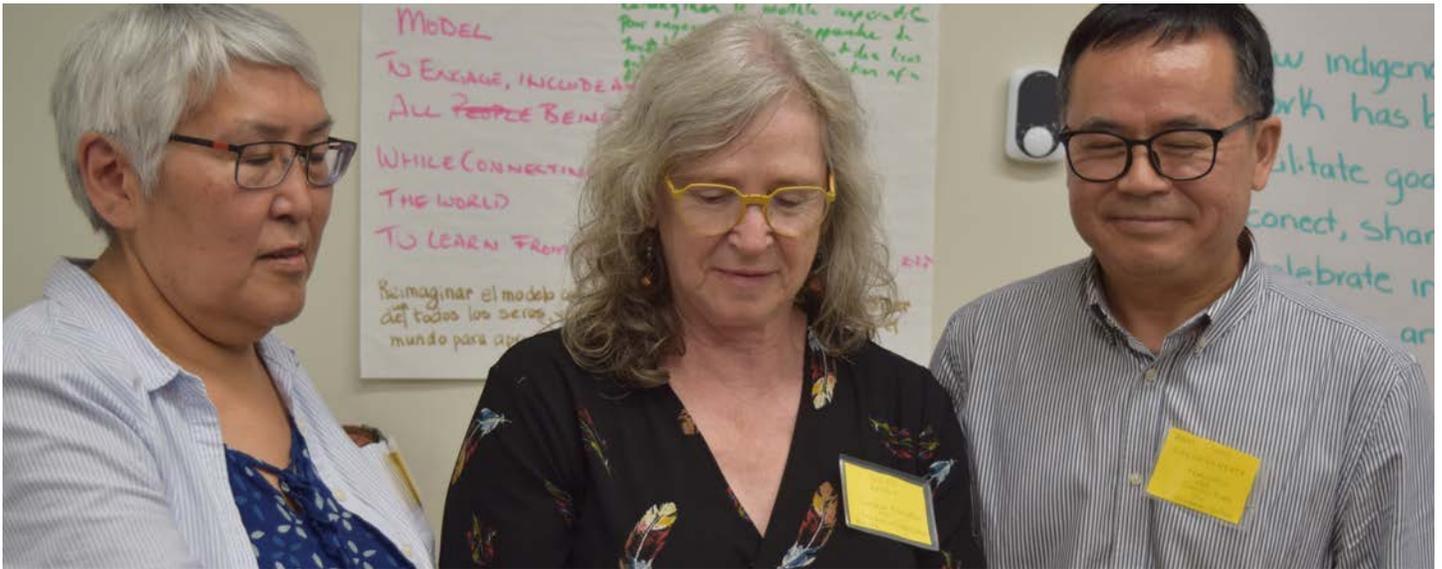
What follows is a synthesis of the ideas that arose in group discussions. The value of bringing together many voices is demonstrated. While a number of common issues and visions are identified, a wide range of topics are covered. This will provide fodder for the next meeting

focused on the “Destiny” of the new network and clarification of purpose, goals and structure.

EXISTING CO-OP NETWORKS

Existing co-operative networks provide experiences and lessons that could benefit a new co-op network. Initial discussion focused on peak experiences from networks that enhance communication, promote relations between academics and practitioners and among co-op developers and provide opportunities for sharing histories, experiences, practices, challenges, resources and research. Co-operatives are part of the solidarity economy with wider implications for individual and society-wide mental and physical wellness and global political and environmental sustainability.

The networks connected to the following organizations were highlighted: Social Co-ops NFL Network, Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation, Co-ops and Mutuals Canada, Conseil Québécois de la Coopérative et de la Mutualité, Social Economy Law, Association for Co-op Educators, Co-op Housing Association, Social/Solidarity Economy Network (Argentina).



A VISION OF THE NETWORK: ADDRESSING COMMON ISSUES

While the small groups initially focused on discovering positive examples, further discussion during the afternoon sessions also identified a number of challenges that a network might encounter and address.

1. Infringement on Indigenous rights
2. Isolation of Indigenous co-ops
3. Colonial structures
4. Co-op training needs
5. Education on the co-operative alternative
6. Government involvement
7. Human resource challenges

1. Infringement on Indigenous rights

Co-operatives are seen as a form of enterprise that can be a vehicle for protecting Indigenous rights. The network could take on the task of further articulating an international declaration of rights, drawing on UNDRIP and supporting the international co-operative movement. This emphasizes the connection between Indigenous rights and the agency of the co-operative movement. The entire network becomes a strong, collective voice for

Indigenous co-operatives and a source of expertise and advocacy.

Members of the network will partner in their work, aligning with co-operative values that are held in common. Led by Indigenous peoples and rooted in Indigenous community traditions, these values are the foundation for Indigenous co-operative models — beyond just theories and checklists. Indigenous models will become a significant part of community and society and a significant and credible source of experience for future research. The ICA can be a source of support to elevate the role of Indigenous co-operatives in the global co-operative movement.

2. Isolation of Indigenous co-operatives

Many Indigenous co-operatives operate in an environment that is isolated from mainstream systems of communication, are geographically separated from population centres and lack the infrastructure to access larger markets. The network will provide a database of members, histories, successes and other information. It will promote inter-co-operation with fellow Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-ops. A co-operative network connected to new partners and allies will result in greater opportunities for collaboration and sharing of knowledge, research, and market information.

3. Colonial Structures

There was support for the call to “decolonize and dismantle” colonial systems. The question arose as to how this would play out day-to-day. Reparations are needed. Indigenous lands need to be protected. Agricultural lands must be reclaimed and conserved. Education must be de-colonized to make room for a decolonized lens. There exist working examples of direct control and empowerment of Indigenous peoples.

To communicate a new dream, we need alternative, Indigenous language and context-sensitive organizations that will employ indigenous ways of stewarding the land including the notion of reciprocal relations among humans and more-than-humans. These organizations should be built on the basis of existing trust-based relationships with a vision of the big circle of life in mind. The Spanish concept of en-mothering power (poder en madre) captures the vision of a strong, holistic, caring co-operative movement. A network would encompass the spectrum of community-based co-operative models. The beneficiaries are the leaders in the project to resolve the on-going tensions between the mainstream co-op model and models that fit the community.

To support this vision, a decolonized co-operative structure is needed — a shift away from standardize colonial templates for articles and bylaws and from the standard Roberts’ Rules of decision making.

4. Co-op training needs

An Indigenous co-operative network would help to address training needs by connecting Indigenous groups across product sectors i.e. coffee, medicinal plants, carving and beading and other fields of traditional and contemporary goods and service expertise. A network could promote communities of practice where people come together to learn and deepen their skills. Co-operative networks are a site for co-learning, sharing best practices, and creating new knowledge. Branches of an Indigenous network might spin off culturally appropriate training centres for financial planning, management and governance and could support local credit unions.



5. Education on co-operative alternatives

The level of general knowledge of the co-operative movement and conditions facing co-operative enterprise varies across nations and regions. This is especially a concern for Indigenous co-operatives. School education programs and land-based education led by elders are other programs that might be shared by an international network.

6. Government involvement and government interference

The opportunity to share and learn from international experiences with government agencies opens up possibilities for those who are involved in such a network. While some governments might see barriers, others might share innovative programs to encourage Indigenous co-operatives. Programs shared within the network to level the floor for Indigenous social enterprise can highlight and address disadvantages that might go unnoticed in some jurisdictions. An example from Universidad Iberoamericana, of a network of academics focused on the alternative social and solidarity economy, illustrates the opportunity for sharing among institutions, involved in the new network. Communication across the network can lead to social innovation to the benefit of the wider Indigenous co-op collective. With a range of international examples, the network will strengthen the voice of Indigenous co-operatives seeking supportive policies. The network can present a challenge to nations where Indigenous co-operatives are excluded from mainstream decision-making.

7. Human Resources

Co-op staff are notoriously time-challenged, given the on-going importance of training and cultivating relations among co-op members. Particularly in small rural co-ops, we find that it takes all day to be poor when it comes to members who have limited incomes. This leaves little time to spend on co-op education and development. Time must be stretched to include production, administration, community and family issues. Even though the effort put into an Indigenous-led network will be time-consuming, it is needed to build knowledge and stimulate innovation.





A NOTE ON THE PROCESS AND NEXT STEPS

During the July 7 workshop, there was plenty of knowledge and experience shared. This report is an effort to capture, and represent as accurately as possible, what was recorded on flip charts with the hope that there are minimal errors and misinterpretations. During session breaks there were additional opportunities to discuss the concept of networking and this is missing from the report.

We are planning a follow-up meeting - virtual this time - so more people will be able to take part. The purpose of this report is to provide a useful foundation on which to further develop the vision of an International Indigenous Co-operative Network.

Thanks to FCNQ for making arrangements for a delicious feast. And thanks to all who contributed to the workshop and shared their time, experience, and wisdom.

PARMELIA SULCATA (SHIELD LICHEN)



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* Please see the FHSS Igniting Change Report and the Charter on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization in the Social Sciences and Humanities.



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