APPENDIX A2

BC and Alberta Node (BALTA)

The BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA) is a regional research collaboration amongst community-based organizations, universities and colleges in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada, with an interest in the social economy. At present, BALTA and its research projects include researchers from: 11 Alberta and BC universities and colleges (Athabasca University, Mount Royal University, Royal Roads University, Selkirk College, Simon Fraser University, St. Joseph’s Theological College, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of the Fraser Valley and University of Victoria) and 20 social economy sector organizations. Researchers from several universities and organizations outside Alberta and BC - including other provinces, the U.S. and the U.K. – have also been involved as research collaborators.

BALTA’s mandate involves researching various aspects of the social economy with a view to both increasing knowledge about the sector and identifying ways to strengthen and expand the sector.

BALTA was somewhat of an exception to the general CURA pattern of university-led and based projects. It was led by a community-based organization, the Canadian Center for Community Renewal. It involved multiple, sector-based organizations and academic institutions. The participating social economy practitioners and academics worked together in a balanced partnership where both had full say in the research and other work that BALTA did.

BALTA also operated as an entity in its own right, with a clearly distinct identity, not as just a project of the lead institution. This was reflected in its structures, decision-making, and public communication. Equitable representation and voice in decision making between the practitioner and academic components of BALTA were fundamental principles. This was reflected in BALTA’s structures. The BALTA steering committee which had overall responsibility for overall guidance of the BALTA programme, was made up of three practitioner representatives, three academic representatives and a student representative.

With its strong commitment to co-construction of the research programme, decision making at all phases of the process included both practitioners and academics. Much of this took place in the three Social Economy Research Clusters (SERCs), each bringing together a mix of university and community
based researchers and social economy practitioners, with both an academic and a practitioner co-chair. The three SERCs are focused on the following themes.

- SERC 1 — Social Enterprises in Human Services and Affordable Housing
- SERC 2 — The Social Economy in Rural Revitalization and Development
- SERC 3 — Analysis, Evaluation and Infrastructure Development

A fourth team focused on mapping and portraiture related to the social economy.

While individual researchers lead specific research projects, the priorities for BALTA’s research and annual research and dissemination/mobilizations work plans were developed and approved by the SERCs. While many of the research projects were then led by academics, practitioners also led a significant number; an increasingly common pattern in the later years of BALTA was for projects to be co-led by both an academic and a practitioner. There was considerable flexibility between the teams, with researchers from SERC sometimes initiating projects that overlapped with the mandates of other SERCs or leading research projects that were under the auspices of other SERCS. There were also some projects that operated under the auspices of more than one SERC and were classified as “cross-cutting” research.

The intent from the beginning was that BALTA would be guided by a broad and unifying strategic vision, but that each team would have significant latitude within that broad vision to develop its own research priorities and specific research projects. The original BALTA proposal to SSHRC laid out broad objectives and the priority themes reflected in the SERC structure. This strategic orientation was further developed in two important working papers developed by the BALTA steering committee during the first year:

- Mapping the social economy in BC and Alberta: Towards a strategic approach (which addressed definitional and conceptual issues), and
- Building a social economy research platform: Towards a strategic decision making approach with the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (which further elaborated the research questions laid out in the proposal to SSHRC and established some criteria for approval of research proposals).