BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)

Project Development and Management Guidelines

Policy Synopsis

The policy provides guidance for SERCs and their members, addressing various aspects of project development and management, including:

➢ Financial and other resources available to support BALTA projects;
➢ Process and guidelines for development of BALTA research project proposals;
➢ Ethical review requirements for research projects;
➢ Roles in the research process;
➢ Recruitment and management of students;
➢ Coordination and support of research;
➢ Financial management of projects;
➢ Monitoring, evaluation and reporting;
➢ Communications and dissemination
➢ Contact information for seeking further information.

Context

BALTA's funding for social economy research comes almost entirely through a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). While the SSHRC grants under its Social Economy Suite are large compared to the grants usually given to individual researchers, they are modest when spread out over five years and a broad research network. SSHRC also imposes various constraints on how its funds can be used. Finally, BALTA itself has established priorities and policies, which shape what types of projects will receive approval for funding and how those projects will be implemented in some respects.

It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit or control the research that researchers may choose to pursue (academic freedom). Indeed, it is to be hoped that a range of research not directly funded/supported by BALTA can still be disseminated and analyzed within BALTA. However, given limited resources and specific BALTA priorities, there will be limits on what research BALTA can directly support. This document provides some guidelines for project identification and development as well as guidelines for project management.

Resources for Research

The limited annual resources available for BALTA research must respond to several types of demand. While each SERC needs resources to support research projects undertaken as part of its mandate, resources are also required for mapping, cross-cutting research and some strategic reserve for urgent opportunities that may emerge during a year. The steering committee will approve annual allocations of resources for research and SERCs will be informed of resources available to them prior to undertaking annual work planning.

The largest pool of funds is the allocation for hiring student research assistants. This amounts to somewhat over $100,000 per year. Lesser funding is available to support project related travel and various other research related costs (supplies, communications, survey administration, etc.).

Given limited resources, BALTA will be relying significantly on in-kind support, in both time and support costs, from our members to implement research projects.

There is one other type of financial support that can be provided in some cases, where relevant. Leading a research project can be time consuming and, in some cases, the appropriate person to lead an area of research will already have onerous other work responsibilities. BALTA has some SSHRC funds available to release an academic from regular academic responsibilities or to provide temporary replacement for a researcher working for a community based organization. In each case, these funds are used to hire someone else to temporarily perform part of that person's regular work duties, freeing up their time to do the BALTA research. (NB: SSHRC policy does not allow us to pay anyone other than students to do research. We can only support release/replacement hiring of other people to free up the researcher's time to do the research while they receive their regular salary from their employer.) BALTA's release/replacement funds are limited and cannot be provided for most research projects. But where circumstances and the priority of the research justify, the steering committee can approve such funding. For further information, consult with BALTA's coordinator.

Project leads and SERCs should identify all resources sought from BALTA within their annual workplans and project proposals. The steering committee will approve budgets as part of approving the annual SERC workplans and all project proposals.

Other forms of support will also be available to projects including some staff support for monitoring and evaluation, communications and dissemination, etc.

Project Identification, Development and Approval Process

The key reference documents for developing research priorities and projects are:

  ➢ The **BALTA project proposal** to SSHRC, which lays out a broad framework;
  ➢ The steering committee approved paper: **Building a Social Economy Research Platform: Towards a Strategic Decision Making Approach within the B.C.-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)**; and
  ➢ The **2007-2008 workplan for each SERC**, which identified multi-year research priorities for the SERCs.

These documents should guide each SERC's discussions and will provide a framework for steering committee ratification of SERC workplans. Specific guidelines for the workplans and associated projects, including criteria for ratification, are contained within the document:

  ➢ **Development and Approval of SERC WorkPlans and Project Proposals**

SERC annual workplans and individual project proposals should follow the appropriate BALTA template:

  ➢ **Template for SERC Workplans**.
  ➢ **Template for BALTA Project Proposals.**

In addition to being used for decisions on project approval, the project proposals are a key guide to students and others implementing research projects. It is therefore important to be as clear and comprehensive as possible in laying out the intended objectives, outputs and outcomes, the research activity plan, roles and responsibilities, etc. The budget included in the project proposal should identify all financial resources sought from BALTA and resources that will be contributed by other partners. Partner support for overhead costs and direct research costs where feasible, is extremely helpful.

Ethical Review

All research conducted under BALTA's auspices must conform to ethical research standards. Royal Roads University (RRU) has been designated as the responsible institution for BALTA ethical reviews. RRU has completed a 'global' ethical review for the BALTA project and has established a straightforward review process for research projects taking place under the BALTA umbrella. RRU does not require a full ethical review for each research project connected to BALTA, but does require that a description of the research project, with copies of all research tools (i.e. questionnaires, interview scripts, etc.) to be used in the research project, be received a minimum of two weeks PRIOR to commencing any research activities. This allows for the BALTA coordinator and Office of Research at RRU to identify any issues requiring clarification or adjustment before research activities get underway.

The BALTA coordinator is available to assist researchers to comply with the ethical research requirements of the BALTA project. Researchers are encouraged to submit their research proposals and research tools as soon as possible to avoid delays in starting their research.

For further information, see the BALTA document, **Ethical Review Process – Simplified**, or contact the BALTA coordinator.

In some cases, individual academic institutions and community based organizations may have their own requirements for ethical review and project approval which have to be met, though some may be willing to accept the RRU process as an equivalent. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all requirements have been met.

Roles in the Research Process

A general description of research related roles of BALTA participants and structures is contained in:

> ➤ **Terms of Reference for BALTA Participants.**

While any SERC member can play a direct role in developing and implementing research projects, it is anticipated that many SERC members will play their role primarily at the level of shaping and advising on the SERC's workplan and research program, but not necessarily through implementing research projects. Most projects will be led and managed by co-investigators. Only co-investigators are eligible to receive direct research financial support from SSHRC funds. Where necessary general BALTA members/collaborators can have their status shifted to co-investigator with the approval of the steering committee and lead investigator.

Student Recruitment and Management

All relevant information is in:

> ➤ **Student Recruitment and Management Policies and Procedures.**

Coordination and Support of Research

Overall coordination and monitoring is the role of BALTA's coordinator. The coordinator will assist SERCs with various aspects of project management and dissemination of results. Leadership and direction to specific research projects/activities comes broadly from the relevant SERC and from the specific SERC member(s) and/or other researcher(s) involved in the research. SERCs will monitor all research projects under their auspices and address any issues

which may arise, bringing them to the attention of the academic coordinator and/or steering committee as appropriate.

Financial Management

Project spending should be in accordance with the approved budget and SSHRC policies on allowable expenses (see Appendix A for a brief summary of relevant SSHRC policies). Proposed changes to the budget should be raised with BALTA's coordinator, who will determine if the proposed change is allowable and what approval will be required.

Project managers should keep full financial records, ensuring approval of spending by authorized persons and tracking the use of all BALTA provided funds. Projects will need to report to BALTA on spending and other contributions, both cash and in-kind.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

There are two aspects which are relevant, both of which are given high priority by SSHRC:

➢ Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the research itself and research results;
➢ Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the performance and learning of people involved in the research project, especially students.

A range of methods and tools will be developed to ensure these requirements are met. The academic coordinator will work with project leads to ensure that monitoring, evaluating and reporting related to students takes place. Other monitoring, evaluation and reporting will be coordinated by BALTA's coordinator. All project leads will be expected to submit a written final report on their project once it is completed. For further information, consult with the academic coordinator with respect to student evaluation and the BALTA coordinator for all other matters.

Communications and Dissemination

SERCs and project leads should build into their plans provision for maximizing the effective dissemination of research results, to both academic and practitioner audiences. Where relevant, support from BALTA staff for such activities can be sought.

All research reports and papers will be entered into BALTA's online library and made accessible through the BALTA website.

For Further Information and Support, Contact:

BALTA Coordinator: Stuart Wulff
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Tel: (250) 723-2296
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Appendix A – SSHRC Policies on Spending

NB: This is only a partial list of SSHRC policies and restrictions on spending. If in doubt, contact BALTA's Coordinator.

A. **Payment for Research Activities –** It is SSHRC's policy that it does not pay anyone to actually do research. It provides various forms of support to facilitate people engaging in research. You cannot use SSHRC funds to pay researcher salaries and benefits (see, however, under 'B' and 'C').

B. **Release Time and Salary Replacement –** There are very limited funds available through BALTA's budget for release time (for academics) and salary replacement (for other researchers). These funds cannot be used to pay researchers directly, but can pay salary and benefits for other organizational staff that assume regular duties of the researcher to free up the researcher's time to be engaged in BALTA research. The amount of release/replacement time covered is only that part of the replacement person's salary and benefits applicable to the tasks transferred to that person. Given the limited release/replacement funds available, this will not apply to all projects. If applicable to your project, you should consult with BALTA's Coordinator to ensure that proper procedures are followed to adhere to SSHRC's policy.

C. **Student Research Assistants –** Salaries can be paid to students involved in BALTA research. See BALTA's *Student Recruitment and Management* policy for further information.

D. **Pre-Project Expenses –** Expenses incurred before approval of a project are not allowable.

E. **Academic Advance Related Costs** – SSHRC funds cannot be used for research leading directly to a degree, nor for direct education related expenses such as tuition, course fees, thesis defence and publication, etc. Professional association memberships are ineligible.

F. **Partner Costs** – Costs can only be covered for project partners from non-profit organizations, and only where such costs conform to other restrictions on use of SSHRC funds.

G. **Overhead Costs** – Organizational overhead costs cannot be covered from SSHRC funds (eg. rent, use of office equipment, insurance).

H. **Teaching Expenses –** Curriculum development expenses, unless directly part of the research, are not allowable, nor is preparation of teaching materials.

I. **Professional Training and Development –** These costs, including computer training, cannot be covered,

J. **Data Collection –** Simple data collection that is not tied to analysis and addressing a research question cannot be funded.

K. **Hospitality and Entertainment –** Cannot be covered.

L. **Communication Costs –** Installation and regular monthly rental/use charges cannot be covered. Direct communication costs attributable to the research can be covered (e.g. long distance phone charges). However, please note that BALTA's budget is very limited and we are hoping that such costs, at least in part, can be an in-kind contribution from organizations supporting specific research projects.