BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)

Development and Approval of SERC WorkPlans and Project Proposals

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Policy Synopsis

The context, process and criteria for development and ratification of SERC workplans and project proposals are explained.

At the initial BALTA planning forum in October 2006, BALTA members stressed the need for a coherent research framework embracing all aspects of the BALTA research effort. It was also emphasized that this framework must address the need to strategically focus BALTA's research efforts (eg. in addressing opportunities where the potential for positive change was the greatest and in building strategic alliances with other sectors).

This policy is intended to strike a balance between allowing a reasonable degree of SERC autonomy and enabling the SERCs and their members to get on with research projects in an expeditious fashion, while at the same time ensuring coherence of the overall research effort and ensuring that research addresses BALTA's priorities.

Each SERC will be expected to develop an annual workplan and specific proposals for each proposed research project. These workplans and project proposals will be approved by the SERC and by the BALTA steering committee. Each workplan should include two basic elements:
  ➢ An updated statement of the strategic vision and broad multi-year research priorities for the SERC; and
  ➢ A detailed workplan for the new operational year, summarizing the proposed research projects for that year.

Detailed individual proposals for each project should accompany the workplan. Both the workplan and project proposals should follow the format laid out in BALTA's templates for workplans and project proposals.

Once the SERCs have submitted their plans, the Steering Committee will review and respond to the workplan of each SERC. This response will take one of three forms:
  1. Ratification of the workplan – perhaps with a few questions of clarification and/or suggested minor modifications. Such ratification would include BALTA commitments to the workplan in terms of resources (students, financial, etc.) and other support.
  2. Endorsement of the workplan in general terms while raising some substantive issues for clarification before the workplan can be ratified.
  3. Return of the workplan to the SERC for further consideration around one or more substantive issues before the Steering Committee can ratify.

It is recognized that each SERC will function best with a reasonable degree of autonomy, but within a coherent overall BALTA research framework. The Steering Committee has two responsibilities within this process:
  ➢ To facilitate and ensure broad coherence of the overall BALTA research effort within a consistent framework and to maximize strategic impact; and
  ➢ To make decisions about the most strategic way of allocating BALTA's scarce resources to maximize BALTA's effectiveness.

It is intended that this strategic coordination role will be conducted in a collegial way between the Steering Committee and the SERCs (as reflected in the fact that all three options for Steering Committee decisions on workplans reflect continued dialogue rather than rejection). Nor are SERC members precluded from pursuing a range of social economy related research that may not, for one reason or another, be priorized and directly supported by BALTA. In such cases, the aim should still be to ensure that all research results are disseminated effectively within and beyond BALTA and that they are incorporated into the broader synthesis of research results that BALTA develops.

Criteria for Assessment of SERC Workplans

For a more detailed explanation of the criteria, see the BALTA working paper, *Building a Social Economy Research Platform: Towards a Strategic Decision Making Approach within the B.C.-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA)*.

For each proposed research priority and each proposed research project/activity, to what extent does it aid BALTA to better understand and critically analyze:

1. The impact of inserting social processes of reciprocity, solidarity, and sustainability into economic life;
2. How territorial (CED) and social economy (enterprise) approaches can interact to enhance the overall potency of the social economy;
3. The social economy as it exists;
4. The characteristics of exemplary practice wherever it occurs, ie. what is working and why;
5. Key issues, opportunities, and constraints for adapting and scaling up what is working in B.C. and Alberta;

For each proposed research priority and each proposed research project/activity, to what extent does it enable BALTA to leverage strategic benefits by:

6. Being directly relevant, even if only modestly, to addressing major cross-cutting trends and issues relevant to Canadians;
7. Leveraging current social economy assets and resources to scale up exemplary practices and stimulate social innovation;
8. Contributing to the building of strategic relationships and alliances relevant to the central purpose of BALTA;

For each proposed research priority and each proposed research project/activity, to what extent does it adequately meet the following operational considerations:

9. Are the intended objectives, activities, outputs and outcomes clear and reasonable (i.e. likely to be achievable)?
10. Does the level of activity specified in the workplan and specific research proposals appear manageable?
11. Is there a clear and appropriate division of roles and responsibilities to ensure that all activities are adequately managed?
12. Are the resource requirements clear and appropriate? Are they within BALTA's and the SERC members' capacity to provide? If not, how realistic are the possibilities of securing adequate additional resources?
13. Is it clear that all students involved in the proposed workplan will be managed in accord with BALTA's policy on student management and that there will be a clear benefit to all students in terms of learning as well as benefit to BALTA in terms of research results?
14. Has provision been made within the SERC plans (eg. regarding recruitment of students) to appropriately address issues of gender equity and diversity?