

Governance Options for the Kootenay Cannabis Sector

A Comparative Analysis

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BACKGROUND

The three-year federally funded research project *Exploring Progressive Solutions: Innovating within the Regional Cannabis Sector*, looks to address ongoing challenges faced by the West Kootenay regional legal cannabis industry. The project, led by Dr. Tracey Harvey and research team, engages and collaborates with a network of stakeholders, including cannabis producers, processors, retailers, local governments, and community organizations, to co-identify, co-design and co-pilot multiple action plans to support and strengthen the regional industry.

A core tenet of the project is the participatory approach, incorporating stakeholder engagement to co-identify regional strengths, challenges, and strategies for moving forward. This method aims to build trust and collaboration among diverse groups within the study region.

SUMMARY

This report examines governance options for establishing a formal structure to support the research project *Exploring Progressive Solutions: Innovating within the Regional Cannabis Sector*, and to sustain regional efforts beyond the project's duration. Formalizing and operationalizing the sector at the regional level is essential for building the collective capacity required to implement the suite of pilot projects identified through industry engagement sessions. Choosing an appropriate governance model will help unify the diverse industry stakeholders within a structured framework, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the research outcomes and ongoing regional collaboration.

Preliminary work within the wider research project has identified the need for a formal organization to represent and organize the cannabis industry in the West Kootenay region. This report outlines seven potential governance models. Each model is presented with a definition, key benefits and challenges, core operational tasks, estimated start-up and ongoing costs, and examples. To support informed decision-making, the report also identifies the approximate number of current (found between June 1st and July 31st, 2025) funding opportunities associated with each model. The seven governance models explored include:

- Co-operative Association
- Non-profit: BC Society
- Social Enterprise: Benefit Business
- Industry Association
- Regional Marketing Board
- Partnership/Umbrella Organization
- Shared Investment Option as a Joint Brokerage Account.

It is important to acknowledge the potential stigma surrounding cannabis-related initiatives, as well as the regulatory challenges posed by federal restrictions on cannabis marketing. These factors may limit

certain activities, and partnerships, and impact other aspects of organizational work. For example, organizations that rely on fundraising may face difficulties securing consistent support, which could affect their capacity and the scale of their initiatives. Additionally, all business models must adhere to federal cannabis marketing regulations, which present barriers to promoting cannabis-related products, services, and experiences. These considerations remain applicable to each governance model examined in this report.

CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) defines a co-operative association as “a business founded by an association of persons seeking to satisfy common needs, such as accessing goods and services, selling products, or improving their quality of life.” (2025, n.p.). Co-operatives are unique to other business models due a membership-ownership feature. This allows for profit sharing and democratic decision-making mechanisms (ISED, 2025). Co-operatives do not adhere to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ structure when it comes to governance or legal incorporation, allowing communities to choose models that reflect their priorities.

1.1 TYPES OF CO-OPERATIVES

Co-operatives (co-op) in BC come in various forms, each serving different purposes. The following list outlines the types of co-operatives associations and is not intended to be preferential to a specific type:

- Community Service Co-ops
- Consumer Co-ops
- Financial Co-ops
- Producer Co-ops
- Worker Co-ops

(BC Co-op Association, n.p., n.d.; Province of Manitoba, n.p., n.d.).

1.2 BENEFITS

1.2.1. Democratic Governance

A co-operative is a democratic, member-owned business model. All members within a co-operative share equal voting rights regarding decision-making for all levels of decisions of the co-operative (ISED, 2025). This can include but is not limited to, budget and expenses, board members, new infrastructure, projects, etc. The [Cooperative Association Act](#) (1999) states that an [co-operative] association must provide in its rules for the election or appointment of the directors of the association other than the first directors (Part 6, Section 74), meaning the only exception to the member-elected board is the first board of directors, who are typically founding members of the association.

1.2.2. General Flexibility

Each different type of co-operative will support different areas of interest and scope. For example, a consumer co-operative is a broad category that includes retail co-ops and housing co-ops (BC Co-operative Association, n.d.). These co-ops are intended to increase access to goods and services through mechanisms such as unit pricing and quality controls (BC Co-operative Association, n.d.). Like other types of co-ops, consumer co-ops are member-owned businesses, and surplus profits are typically shared with members, or reinvested into the mission or services of the association if the co-op functions as a non-profit (BC Co-operative Association, n.d.).

1.2.3. Projects and Programs Planning

Programming and the activities of a co-operative association will vary depending on the type of co-operative chosen. For example, a community service co-operative can function very similarly to a non-profit, with profits reinvested into the mission of the association, rather than redistributed to members as profit shares (BC Co-operative Association, n.d.). In other types of co-operatives, members may be required to pay one-time fees to support activities when surplus is not available (Marlene Madsen, Personal Communication, 2025).

Based on the collective experience of our research team, operating a co-operative typically involves a range of tasks across the project life cycle. Early stages may include project planning, proposal development and budgeting. During implementation, responsibilities often extend to project management, progress monitoring, and stakeholder communication. Following project delivery, additional tasks may focus on evaluating outcomes and capturing lessons learned.

1.3 CHALLENGES

1.3.1 Funding and Innovation

According to a report released by the Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (2023), there are multiple ongoing challenges that co-operatives face. One of the most persistent challenges is accessing consistent funding which limits operational and expansion activities. Based on the current funding availability research conducted, there are very few current opportunities for funding from government programs (e.g., grants and subsidies) compared to other governance models, such as a non-profit.

1.3.2. Lack of Understanding

Another common challenge associated with co-operatives is a lack of awareness among their own members regarding the purpose, power, and benefits of membership. In a report released by the Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (2023), the author Yu, highlights that many co-op members have a limited understanding of what membership entails, such as voting rights, or the significance of holding a share. This can hinder efforts to build community support, engage and onboard new members and may contribute to confusion or conflicting expectations among existing members.

1.3.3. Commitment and Remuneration

Establishing a co-operative requires individuals to commit to various roles that support the different functions of the association. Some of the activities may be fulfilled by contractors or be reimbursed through honorariums (e.g., bookkeeping, marketing, etc.), but many of the activities within the organization require a volunteerism commitment. Board of directors are eligible for compensation based on services offered (e.g., honorariums) according to terms from the *Co-operative Association Act*; see section 1.4.2. for further details related to co-operative capital and financing. The minimum time commitment required to operate a co-op, whether through volunteer contributions or paid roles, is estimated to be approximately one-fifth of a full time equivalent (e.g., 0.2 FTE).

1.4 FORMING A BC CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

The following is an overview of key tasks for starting a co-operative in BC. This list is an overview and is subject to vary and change based on various conditions.

1.4.1. Pre-development

Prior to formal establishment of a co-operative association, the interested group should consider why a co-operative model is best suited for their business needs. In this stage, groups may consider the various types of co-operatives to ensure they choose one that will represent their members in addition to serving the various activities sought by the group. BC Co-operative Association (n.d.) recommends first consulting with prospective members and confirming business concepts and commitment. During this stage, it is recommended to formalize information collected into a document formatted like a business plan.

1.4.2 Raising Capital and Financing

The BC Co-operative Association published a *Cultivating Co-ops Guide* (2018), which includes a section related to capital and finance. While the purpose of a co-op as a type of business is to operate with enough of a surplus to sustain activities, it is realistic that in the first few years, a new co-operative may struggle to obtain surplus or break even (BC Co-operative Association, 2018). It is recommended that the business plan (during 'pre-development') should also contain strategies for raising capital (BC Co-operative Association, 2018, p.37). This may include grants, loans, finance programs and/or, private investment. An operational budget should also be developed with consideration to costs such as but not limited to, wages, marketing, incorporation fees, equipment or infrastructure (BC Co-operative Association, 2018, p.38).

1.4.3. Consult with law or legal services (optional, but recommended)

This step is optional, but a recommendation listed by the Government of BC (2024b) as part of their co-operative guidelines. A lawyer can support prospective co-operatives in preparing a memorandum of association and establishing co-operative rules, ensuring that these documents remain compliant with the [Cooperative Association Act](#) (Government of BC, 2024). BC Registries will not advise or support organizations in the stage of drafting or developing key documents. Navigating government processes can be challenging and this step is recommended for those who prefer support (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.4. Register or Request a Name

To begin, submit a name request through the [BC Registries online portal](#). A payment of \$30 is required. Processing typically takes between 7 to 14 days (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.5 Subscribers

A minimum of three subscribers are required to sign the memorandum, rules and establish first directors, which formally establishes the co-operative association. According to the *Co-operative Association Act* (1999) a "subscriber means a person or eligible organization that makes and subscribes

the memorandum that is filed with the registrar” (section 1.1). The function of the subscriber role is limited to the initial stages of forming the co-operative only (Co-operative Association Act, 1999).

1.4.6. Prepare a Memorandum of Association

The memorandum outlines the purpose and values of the co-op. It should include the name and purpose of the co-operative, any restrictions or powers, and other details which will vary depending on the type of co-op being formed (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.7. Draft the Rules of the Co-op

Setting rules is a legal requirement under the [Cooperative Association Act](#) with details regarding rules found in section 13. Rules should be designed with flexibility to accommodate future changes, such as meeting conduct or membership requirements. Rules may pertain to governance, goals, membership criteria, financial management and other topics which may vary depending on the type of co-op (Co-operative Association Act, 1999).

1.4.8. Establish First Directors

The first three directors of the co-operative will be determined by the three subscribers. In section 73 of the [Cooperative Association Act](#) there is no statement that restricts subscribers from becoming a first director. First directors will only hold this position until the first annual general meeting, at which point members will vote on director positions going forward. At any given time, at least one director must be a resident of BC, and all directors must be at least 18 years of age and in good legal standing (Co-operative Association Act, 1999, section 79).

1.4.9. Sign and Witness Key Documents

To formalize the co-operative, all the three subscribers must agree to and sign the key documents (e.g., memorandum and rules). These signatures must be properly witnessed (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.10. Set Up a Registered Office

A physical address is required for a co-op; identify a physical office space and complete the Notice of Registered Office form. This office address will be used for all official communications and notices. If the registered address changes later, a fee will apply (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.11. Incorporate the Co-operative Association (Optional)

Incorporation is optional but provides legal capacity for the co-op to incur debt, enter contracts, and carry out business in its own name. A \$250 registration fee is required. To incorporate a co-operative association, you must first register online with [BC Registries](#). Within this portal there is a form specific to incorporating a co-operative association (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.4.12. Annual General Meetings and Reporting

All co-ops must hold an annual general meeting within four months of their fiscal year-end. The purpose of the AGM is to vote on important matters, elect new directors as needed, and present financial statements to members. An annual report must be filed within two months of the meeting and has a \$30 filing fee; it can be filed through the online [BC Registries](#) portal (Government of BC, 2024[b]). Co-operatives must maintain a record of all meeting minutes; Co-op Creator (n.d.[b]) recommends creating a digital ‘minutes book’ document to organize and maintain all meeting-notes as well as house other key co-operative documents such as rules, the memorandum, a membership directory and more.

1.4.13. Maintain Proper Financial Records

Accurate records of all financial transactions must be kept. Annual financial statements should be prepared and made available to members (*Co-operative Association Act, 1999*). A co-operative association may consider hiring a bookkeeper to support financial management and ensure compliance (Co-op Creator, n.d.[a]). A co-op could consider the following resources from a Canadian resource database, [Co-op Creator](#) (n.d.[a]), that details information pertaining to proper co-operative association financial management.

- [Creating a Preliminary Budget](#)
- [Sample Bookkeeper Contract](#)
- [How to Read Financial Statements](#)

1.5 MAINTAINING A BC CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

In this section are the key ongoing tasks associated with BC co-operative associations as per the *Co-operative Association Act* (1999).

1.5.1 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Co-operatives are required to hold an annual general meeting (AGM) every year, within four months of the co-op’s fiscal year-end (Government of BC, 2024b). Activities at the AGM may include director elections, member voting on important decisions and presentation of financial statements (Co-op Creator, n.d.[a]).

1.5.2. Annual Reporting and Record Keeping

An annual report must be filed with BC. Registries within two months of the AGM. This filing confirms the co-op’s ongoing legal status. A filing fee of \$30 applies. Filing updates through [BC Registries](#) online are required when there are special amendments such as director changes, rule changes, address changes, etc. Filing fees for these changes range from \$20-\$100 (Government of BC, 2024[b]).

1.5.3. Ensure Compliance with the Co-operative Association Act

All co-op activities must comply with the [Cooperative Association Act](#) and the co-op’s registered rules. The co-op must report changes such as amendments to rules, changes in directors, or changes to the

registered office address to BC Registries. Reported changes will incur filing fees (Co-operative Association Act, 1999).

1.5.4. Board of Directors

Directors are expected to support the success of the association. Their responsibilities may include but are not limited to developing and maintaining key documents (e.g., meeting minutes), membership management, annual reporting, and financial management (White, 2021). Overall, directors are key players in ensuring compliance with the *Co-operative Association Act* and other internal policies and rules.

1.5.5. Maintain a Registered Office

The co-op must maintain a registered office in BC. This address will be used for official communication and legal notices. Any change must be submitted to the registry along with the applicable form and fee (Co-operative Association Act, 1999).

1.6 KEY COST ESTIMATES

1.6.1 Estimated Start-up Costs for a Co-operative Association	
Name Register (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$30
Basic Incorporation Fee (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$250
List of First Director Form Fee (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$20
Registered Office Form Fee (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$20
Estimated Legal Fees (D. Lytwyn, Personal Communication, 2025).	Ranges from \$1550 - \$3000 (subject to vary, determined case by case).
Estimated Total Start-up Costs	Up to \$3300

1.6.2 Estimated Ongoing Costs for a Co-operative Business	
Filing annual report (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$30
Address change fee (as needed) (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$20
Special Resolution Changes (as needed). (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$70
Director change fee (as needed). (Government of BC, 2024[b]).	\$30
Budget for Contractor Compensation (includes, honorariums, contractor fees, fee-for-services).	Minimum 1/5 FTE @ \$21.82 per hour (living wage) = \$8,728
Estimated Minimum Ongoing Costs	\$8,878

1.7 EXAMPLES

1.7.1 BC Craft Farmers Co-op

The purpose of the [BC Craft Farmers Co-op](#) is to facilitate market access and reduce barriers to accessing resources for craft producers, processors and retailers in BC. BC Craft Farmers Co-op retains a focus on boosting BC cannabis on the international stage. Co-op members are required to pay annual fees ranging from \$99-500 depending on type of members. By paying this fee, members have access to networking and education events, community partnerships and discounts, shared purchasing power (e.g., legal, accounting, financial services, insurance, etc), and government advocacy.

1.7.2 Gabriola Agricultural Co-op (GAC)

The [Gabriola Agricultural Co-op](#) is governed by a board of directors and operates through volunteer-led committees. The co-op organizes various initiatives related to sustainable agriculture and local food systems. GAC hosts seasonal farmers' markets, providing vendor-members with a marketplace to sell their products (e.g., produce, preserves, handmade goods, etc). GAC also organizes various community engagement events promoting local food culture (e.g., Farm to Table Fest, Apple Fest). This organization also delivers food security programming focused on providing access to nutritious meals and supporting low-income community members.

1.7.3 BC ECO Seed Co-op

[BC Eco Seed](#) is a producers' co-operative that grows and provides BC-grown seed that is ecologically grown, certified organic and regionally selected. All seeds are grown from members within the co-op across BC. The mission of BC ECO Seed Co-op is "to increase the quantity and improve the quality of ecological and organic seed grown in BC. From packets to bulk quantities, the co-op has seeds for all growers" (n.d.). Beyond this, the co-op also supports education surrounding seed sovereignty and sustainable regional and global food systems. Members in this co-op can pool resources and infrastructure, participate in educational opportunities and support and join collaboration and networking opportunities.

2.0 NON-PROFIT MODEL: BC SOCIETIES

Non-profit organizations registered in BC are called BC Societies, which are independent organizations that operate in compliance with the [BC Societies Act](#). BC Societies must not earn profits and revenues earned must be allocated to activities that further the goal and/or purpose of the organization. An exception to revenue allocation is staff salaries and administrative costs associated with the organization (Government of British Columbia, n.d., n.p.). Over half of the current funding opportunities explored by our research team are specific to non-profit organizations including BC Societies.

2.1 BENEFITS

2.1.1. Funding

According to Statistics Canada (2023) non-profit organizations in Canada, which include BC Societies, receive funding from a range of channels. This includes government funding at all levels (federal, provincial, municipal), private and personal donations, endowments, sponsorships, grants, and investment interest income. These funding sources are also in addition to various “other funding sources” which may include membership fees (Statistics Canada, 2023, n.p.).

2.1.2. Investment Opportunities

According to Section 33 of the [Societies Act](#), “a society may invest its funds only (a) in accordance with its bylaws, or (b) in an investment in which a prudent investor might invest, unless the bylaws prohibit that investment” (n.p., 2015). This would support any potential investments as discussed by stakeholders.

2.1.3. Collaboration

A non-profit model offers opportunities for multi-stakeholder collaboration in a range of ways, with the purpose of working more effectively toward shared goals (Palette Skills, 2023). Collaborating across sectors, for example between private sector, academia and the non-profit sector can further reduce silos, and increase innovation (Palette Skills, 2023). Collaborations can vary in scale and be as simple as sharing knowledge or funding through shared projects, to addressing complex policy issues and challenges (Palette Skills, 2023).

2.1.4. Autonomy

While organizations must remain compliant with the [Societies Act](#), there is autonomy surrounding the purpose of the organization, and types of projects delivered so long as organizations can gain access to funding for their activities.

2.2 CHALLENGES

2.2.1. Commitment and Remuneration

The formalization of a non-profit organization would require a volunteerism commitment from those within industry to support leadership roles and other activities. While some activities may be carried out by volunteers, other activities may require paid support by contractors through honorariums, fee-for-service agreements, or hourly wages. Depending on the scope of the organization and its activities, the

time commitment for volunteers will vary. However, to maintain basic operations of a non-profit, an estimated equivalent of one day per week (i.e., 0.2 FTE) of effort (which could be shared among multiple individuals) is anticipated.

2.2.2. Funding

Funding opportunities are often competitive, and can reflect key government policy priorities (e.g., healthcare, housing, food security). As well, it is especially important to consider that for a non-profit option, cannabis-related stigma may restrict or limit funding success.

2.3 FORMING A BC SOCIETY

The following list includes key actions required to form and maintain a non-profit under the [Societies Act](#) in BC.

2.3.1. Predevelopment: mission and vision

Prior to legal tasks, those interested in forming a non-profit organization should spend time clarifying the mission and vision of the prospective organization. Developing these concepts early will more clearly guide the future activities of the organization (Board Source, 2025). The mission should define the purpose of an organization and what it does every day, while the vision should describe the future goals and aspirations of an organization (Board Source, 2025).

2.3.2 Predevelopment: organization purpose

After determining mission and vision, the prospective organization should ensure these are in alignment with the purposes outlined in the [BC Societies Act](#). The purpose is the type of cause, activity or support the society will promote, including but not limited to the following:

- Agriculture
- Art/culture
- Education
- Environment
- Social

(Government of BC, 2024[a]).

2.3.3. Bylaws and Directors

As per the *Societies Act*, organizations have an option to either adopt a pre-approved set of bylaws or create them from scratch. Bylaws are intended to outline the rules and procedures of an organization. It is recommended that if organizations wish to develop their own bylaws to consult with a lawyer, as the BC Registry office will not verify or provide advice on bylaws developed by organizations (Government of BC, 2024[a]).

Societies must have a minimum of three directors, with at least one of them a current resident in BC. An exception is for a member-funded society, as only one director is required, and they are not required to be a resident in BC (Government of BC, 2024[a]). Section 67 of the *BC Societies Act* (2015) provides details pertaining to non-profits that includes a membership structure.

2.3.4. Request/reserve a society name

Societies must have their name approved, ensuring there is no conflict with existing organizations or private businesses. There is a cost of \$30 for name reserves or requests. Organizations can complete this process online through BC Registries with the [Societies Online](#) portal. This takes between 7-14 days to process (Government of BC, 2024[a]).

2.3.5. Incorporate Society (optional)

When an organization becomes incorporated, it becomes an official legal entity with the ability to enter legal contracts, incur debt or gain funding. There is a cost of \$100 to file for incorporation as a BC Society. Organizations can complete this process online through BC Registries with the [Societies Online](#) portal (Government of BC, 2024[a]).

2.4 MAINTAINING A BC SOCIETY

2.4.1. Administration

To maintain the status of a BC society it is required to hold annual general meetings and complete the subsequent report and filing. Directors are responsible for ensuring that activities remain in compliance with the [Societies Act](#) (Government of BC, 2024[a]).

2.4.2. Ongoing fees and filing

There are various fees that may occur. For example, there is a fee for address or director changes; additional fees are outlined in section 2.5 of the *BC Societies Act* (2015).

2.4.3. Strategic Planning (Optional)

Strategic planning frameworks are important to organization success, and this includes non-profits such as BC Societies (Laridae, n.d.). Strategic plans define clear direction and priorities which can inform project activities. By having a strategic plan, organizations can better direct their resources and capacity to ensure greatest impact (Laridae, n.d.). Strategic planning also ensures alignment among staff, board, and stakeholders toward shared long-term goals (Laridae, n.d.). While this step is optional, it is recommended to support overall success through a clear organization framework that can be referenced in any stage of planning. [Wines of British Columbia](#) provides a snapshot of their organization's strategic plan, '[Wine BC 2030](#)', on their website.

2.4.4. Project and Programs Planning

Based on the collective experience of our research team, maintaining a non-profit typically involves a range of tasks across the project life cycle. Early stages may include project planning, proposal development and budgeting. During implementation, responsibilities often extend to project

management, progress monitoring, and stakeholder communication. Following project delivery, additional tasks may focus on evaluating outcomes and capturing lessons learned.

2.4.5. Fundraising

Based on the collective experience of our research team, a non-profit should continuously seek fundraising for projects and activities; organizations should commit to ongoing research into existing and emerging funding and grant opportunities across the public and private sector. Beyond ongoing research, organizations should always be actively applying to relevant funding opportunities that align with their organization's activities, such as private donations and campaign fundraising.

2.5 ESTIMATED KEY COSTS

2.5.1 Estimated Start-up Costs for a BC Society	
Name Register (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$30
Basic Filing Fee (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$250
List of First Director Form Filing (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$20
Registered Office Filing (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$30
Estimated Legal Fees (D. Lytwyn, Personal Communication, 2025).	Cost are determined on a case-by-case basis. Expect a minimum of \$1500 ranging upwards to \$3000, depending on the scope and complexity of work. ¹
Estimated Total Start-up Costs	Up to \$3330

¹ Note that some law firms may offer reduced rates for non-profit organizations based on discretion (D. Lytwyn, Personal Communication, 2025).

2.5.2 Estimated Ongoing Costs for a BC Society	
File Annual Report (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$40
Address Change Fee (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$15
Change of Name or Purpose Fee (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$50
Director Changes Fee (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$15
Bylaw Change Fee (Government of BC, 2024[a]).	\$50
Budget for Contractor Compensation (includes, honorariums, contractor fees, fee-for-services).	Minimum 1/5 FTE @ \$21.82 per hour (living wage) = \$8,728
Estimated Minimum Ongoing Costs	\$8,898

2.6 EXAMPLES

2.6.1. *Craft Cannabis Association of BC*

The [Craft Cannabis Association of BC](#) is a non-profit organization that focuses on supporting small-scale producers. As part of their organization's mission, they seek to support equitable economic opportunity and advocate for better legislation. Their initiatives and resources include a licensing application guide, advocacy and position papers. Most recently, Craft Cannabis Association received funding from the BC Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure program for a cannabis tourism planning project: *Building the Cowichan Cannabis Trail*.

2.6.2. *Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CRFAIR)*

[CRFAIR](#) started as a coalition of organizations formed under a roundtable structure with the purpose to collaboratively advance regional food security in the Capital region. To increase impact and access funding, CRFAIR eventually incorporated into an independent organization. Today, CRFAIR engages in policy research, community engagement and education activities in addition to supporting pilot initiatives with other organizations. CRFAIR supports emerging food-systems organizations to develop capacity through network and funding. The core purpose central to all activities at CRFAIR is supporting and strengthening a regional food security network to collectively achieve common goals.

2.6.3 *Cowichan Wineries Society*

[Cowichan Wineries Society](#) is a collective of Cowichan wine producers that promote the unique regional wine industry of the Valley, offering education around the history of the region's industry, coordinating networking, promoting events and supporting Cowichan's designation as a sub-geographical indication region. The society has multiple ongoing activities including, an August wine passport, an annual festival celebrating regional fares and a Cowichan wineries map resource.

3.0 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE – BC BENEFIT COMPANY

A benefit company in BC is a for-profit company that conducts its business in a “responsible and sustainable way” (BC Center for Social Enterprise, n.d., n.p.). Benefit companies must choose one or more ‘public benefit(s)’ to support, meaning that there must be a positive effect for a group of people as a result of their business activities ([Government of BC](#), n.d., np). Information pertaining to the BC Benefit Company exists within the *Business Corporations Act* (2002), section 2.3. Based on research conducted by our team, there are no current options for grant funding available to BC Benefit Companies. There are loan and finance options that exist specific to social enterprises.

3.1 BENEFITS

3.1.1 Value-Based Business

A Benefit Company structure differs from a traditional business in that social purpose is embedded into their business model which may attract customers with alignment of values. As a business, it may be easier to attract more capital investment compared to a non-profit.

3.2 CHALLENGES

3.2.1. Responsibilities

Benefit companies have more responsibilities in comparison to a traditional business. They must have a minimum of three directors and must publish benefit reports according to the *Business Corporations Act*; this may increase administrative burdens and costs. Despite their social mission, Benefit Companies are still considered for-profit businesses, which can limit funding and partnership opportunities (Bennett Jones, 2020).

3.2.3 Paid Staff

Businesses in BC are required to pay staff at least the minimum wage per hour. Staff must be paid “at least semimonthly” (Part 3.16). There are no sections within the *Employment Standards Act* (1996) that can be waived and employees must be made aware of their rights within the *Act* (Part 1.5). Should a BC Benefit business be pursued, this document should be considered in detail.

3.2.3. Democracy

Unlike the co-operative structure, incorporation within the *Business Corporations Act* (2002) allows no built-in mechanisms for democratic decision-making. As a result, this governance model is less collaborative in nature. As a single-business entity it would be challenging to ensure fair representation of a coalition of industry players.

3.3 FORMING A BC BENEFIT COMPANY

BC Benefit Companies are established according to the same process of a standard business, under the *BC Corporation Act* (2002); the key difference is identifying the “public benefit” of the company and completing additional “benefit reports” which are not required by standard businesses (Part 2.3). The following list outlines the key steps required:

3.3.1. Develop a business plan

Prior to embarking on the steps of establishing a business it is important to first develop a business plan or proposal that outlines the intention and type of business (Government of BC, 2025). There are various resources online to support these efforts, including the [Start Your Business](#) online resource directory from the BC government.

3.3.3. Register a name

Choose a business name and register it online through [BC Registries](#) portal. There is a \$30 filing fee (BC Registry Services, 2023).

3.3.4. Create an incorporation agreement

An incorporation agreement must be signed by all individuals that are incorporators of the company. Incorporators can also be shareholders and directors once the company is incorporated. For Benefit Companies, an incorporation agreement must also state the social purpose (BC Registry Services, 2023). Templates for incorporation agreements located [here](#).

3.3.3. Establish company articles (i.e., rules)

A Benefit Company's articles are the rules that govern the company, shareholders, directors and officers. Articles must also state the public benefits the company commits to promote (BC Registry Services, 2023).

3.3.4 File incorporation agreement

Once agreement is completed and articles are established, agreements can be filed online through [BC Registries](#), there is a \$350 filing fee (BC Registry Services, 2023).

3.4 ESTIMATED KEY COSTS

3.4.1 Estimated Start-up Costs for a BC Benefit Company	
Name Registration Fee (BC Registry Services, 2023).	\$30
Company Incorporation Fees (BC Registry Services, 2023).	\$350
Total Estimated Start-up Costs	\$380

3.4.2 Estimated Ongoing Costs for a BC Benefit Company	
Annual Report Fee (Government of BC, 2025[b]).	\$43.38
Notice of Address Change Fee (Government of BC, 2025[b]).	\$20
“Form for Agents” Fee (includes, notice of office change, elimination, records transfer) (Government of BC, 2025[b]).	\$40+
Forms 7-52 ² (Government of BC, 2025[b]).	Ranges from \$20-350
Estimated annual salary of one full-time staff based on the 2024 Nelson Living Wage of \$21.82 per hour. (Living Wage BC, 2024).	\$45,385
Total Estimated Ongoing Costs	Up to \$45,838.38

² See [Forms, Fees and Information Packages](#) for a complete list of potential fees. These fees may not apply to all BC Benefit Companies; this directory should be referenced on a case-by-case basis.

3.5 EXAMPLES

3.5.1 *Buy Social Canada*

[Buy Social Canada](#) is a pop-up social enterprise retail marketplace that only sells products for businesses operating under the social enterprise model (e.g., benefit business).

3.5.2 *Budgie Box*

[Budgie Box](#) is a gift box service that reinvests most profits into supporting local, small businesses in Vancouver. Their Custom gift boxes contain various small business products while emphasizing the stories behind the businesses.

4.0 INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

Industry alliances (referred to also as industry councils, trade associations, and sector councils) are a type of organization built upon collaboration of players within a specific industry (often regional). Typically, work associated with these organizations includes but is not limited to economic development projects, employment programs and advocacy. Based on the examples provided in this section of the report, many industry alliances are typically formed as non-profit and to include a membership component; details pertaining to non-profit membership functions can be found in Section 67 of the [BC Societies Act](#).

There are several definitions to describe the purpose of this type of organization. According to the Association of Industry Sector Councils (n.d.) “Sector Councils are not-for-profit, industry-specific associations... that address current workforce challenges and proactively plan for future needs as they adapt to change” (n.p.). An industry council is described by Dalziel (2006) as a “non-profit organization with specialized knowledge and capabilities” (n.p.). Based on the research in this report, the primary difference between industry alliances and a broader non-profit is that non-profits tend to focus on advancing a broader purpose across various initiatives, whereas industry alliances typically represent and advocate for a specific sector, with initiatives focused in related specific areas. As a type of non-profit organization, there are currently many funding opportunities available to an organization of this type.

4.1 BENEFITS

4.1.1. *Collaboration and Innovation*

This type of non-profit organization supports collaboration between a range of industry-specific stakeholders focused on “promotion, market development and research” to benefit the industry (Government of BC, 2024[c]). According to Dalziel (2006), these types of groups allow for increased opportunities for innovation due to the concentration of industry-specific knowledge, experiences and skills.

4.1.2. *Funding*

Because an industry alliance can be established as a non-profit under the *BC Societies Act*, it would be eligible to apply for funding opportunities available to non-profit organizations. This structure offers access to a broader range of potential funding sources compared to some other governance models. See section 2.0 of this report for information pertaining to funding within the non-profit model.

4.2 CHALLENGES

4.2.1. *Funding*

Large funders (e.g., government, foundations, etc.) commonly consider advocacy-related activities as ineligible for granting funding. Since a primary activity within industry councils is sector-related advocacy, funding may be more limited despite status as a non-profit. Furthermore, stigma regarding

the cannabis industry may limit funding success. Lack of funding limits the capacity of the organization to deliver projects and initiatives.

4.2.2. Extent of Work and Commitment

This would also require individuals within the industry to step into the commitment of leadership roles associated with a non-profit. While there is the ability to compensate those in leadership and staff-related roles, the ability to pay is dependent on funding. While some work can be supported through volunteerism, management-level work should be compensated. The level of commitment for an industry association will vary depending on the scope of the organization. See section 2.0 of this report for information pertaining to volunteer and paid staff costs within the non-profit model.

4.3. FORMING AN INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

4.3.1. Predevelopment

See section 2.0 of this report for predevelopment work associated with non-profits under the *BC Societies Act*.

4.3.2. Registry and Incorporation as a BC Society

Industry councils are typically formed under the *BC Societies Act*. For start-up tasks associated with BC societies see section 2.0 of this report.

4.4 MAINTAINING AN INDUSTRY ALLIANCE

4.4.1. Maintaining a BC Society

See section 2.0 of this report for an overview of steps related to maintaining a BC Society organization.

4.4.2. Advocacy and Government Engagement

Industry councils should ensure members stay informed on regulatory changes. Members should be willing to pursue collective advocacy efforts through position papers, networking events and education opportunities.

4.5 ESTIMATED KEY COSTS

If an Industry Alliance is formalized as a non-profit organization the costs associated with BC Societies will be mirrored. Refer to section 2.0 for an overview of costs.

4.6 EXAMPLES

4.6.1. BC Agriculture Council

The [BC Agriculture Council](#) (BCAC) is a province-wide non-profit organization that represents the interests of various agricultural sectors in British Columbia. It advocates for policies and programs that support sustainable farming, market growth, and rural economic development. The BCAC plays a key role in bringing together farmers, industry stakeholders, and government to address issues affecting the province's agriculture community.

By fostering collaboration and providing leadership on important issues such as environmental stewardship and trade, the BC Agriculture Council helps ensure a strong and competitive agricultural industry in the province. It also facilitates education and information sharing to promote innovation and best practices among its members.

The BCAC relies primarily on funding sponsorship to support their activities as an organization. Their funders range from corporate sponsors to foundation sponsors. In addition, BCAC offers a membership feature to farmers who join their network; membership fees also support their activities.

4.6.2. Wines of BC

[Wines of BC](#) promotes exports of BC's wine industry locally, nationally, and internationally. The organization supports tourism, education (e.g., wine festivals, tasting tours) and collaborates with a range of stakeholders (retailers, producers, tourism) in the industry to achieve goals and deliver on programs. Wine BC activities are supported by membership fees. Other activities may be supported by some of the revenue collected through their programming.

4.6.3. BC Fruit Growers Association

The [BC Fruit Growers Association](#) is an organization dedicated to supporting fruit growers across British Columbia. It provides advocacy, research, marketing and education. They host conferences and workshops that enable members to collaborate and network within the industry. This organization appears to rely on membership fees to support their activities as they do not list any funding sponsors on their website. However, they recently (February 19, 2025) announced a \$10 million dollar support fund from the Provincial Government.

4.6.4. BC Cannabis Alliance

The [BC Cannabis Alliance](#) is a newer, informal industry-focused organization that aims to represent and amplify craft growers in policy and regulatory discussions. Current activities at BC Cannabis Alliance include publishing a policy paper that discusses issues, background, and recommendations for the BC licensed cannabis industry. Themes listed in the recommendations included, increased grant funding, adjustments to farmgate licensing, and consumption and enforcement regulations.

5.0 REGIONAL MARKETING BOARD

According to Veeman (2011) an agricultural marketing board is “a statutory body which acts as a marketing agent, performing or controlling one or more of the functions of marketing on behalf of producers of specific agricultural commodities” (n.p.). This concept could theoretically apply to the regional cannabis industry of the West Kootenay region to specifically support projects that promote cannabis tourism and/or promote the region’s unique, rich and high-quality cannabis products. Regional marketing boards can formalize as non-profits under the *BC Societies Act*.

5.1 BENEFITS

5.1.1. Regional Relevance

Based on the example from the [Bay of Quinte](#), there may be an opportunity to create a regional coalition of small towns to promote tourism and resident attraction, while promoting a key industry within the region (e.g., like craft beer across Quinte Bay).

5.1.2. Branding and Quality Certifications

Regional marketing boards share similar functions to an industry council, in that they often conduct research related to and the promotion of specific products (e.g., dairy). Some regional marketing boards also include in part of their design a branding or quality program, for example the [Dairy Farmers of Canada](#) have ‘blue label’ branding for Canadian Dairy. This encourages consumers to opt for any product with the blue label while shopping, as it has been quality assured and certified by a reputable branding organization.

5.2 CHALLENGES

5.2.2. Commitment and Remuneration

See 2.2.1 in Section 2.0 – Non-profit Model: BC Society.

5.2.3. Funding

Funding opportunities are often competitive, and can reflect key government policy priorities (e.g., healthcare, housing, food security). As well, it is important to consider with this option that existing stigma surrounding the cannabis sector could potentially impact fundraising success.

5.2.4 Regulatory Challenges

Cannabis is currently unlikely to qualify for government recognition due to the strict federal marketing restrictions surrounding the promotion of cannabis and other structural, political and legal reasons. For example, other agriculture-related marketing boards are legislated under agricultural and food legislations, with a focus on the need for productive and supported industries based on public need. By comparison, cannabis production is regulated under Health Canada as a controlled substance. Larger boards such as Dairy Farmers of Canada are established and operated in accordance with provincial and/or federal government legislation and receive core funding from these agencies (e.g. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada).

5.3 FORMING AND MAINTAINING A REGIONAL MARKETING BOARD

5.3.1 Formalize organization

The option to best formalize this type of organization would be as a non-profit model within the *BC Societies Act*. A regional marketing board concept could be developed within the guidelines of the *BC Societies Act*. See Section 2.0 – Non-profit Model: BC Society of this report for an overview of required steps.

5.4 ESTIMATED KEY COSTS

5.4.1. BC Society

If a marketing board is formalized as a non-profit organization the costs associated with BC Societies will be mirrored. Refer to section 2.0 for an overview of costs.

5.5 EXAMPLES

5.5.1 Bay of Quinte

The [Bay of Quinte](#) “A public-private destination marketing and management organization” with the aim of promoting tourism and resident attraction to regional-area partners (Belleville, Quinte West, Brighton, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and Greater Napanee). The highlight from this example is the coalition of smaller communities within a wider region to promote key industries within the region including craft beer.

5.5.2 Dairy Farmers of Canada

The [Dairy Farmers of Canada](#) does not explicitly state status as a marketing board, however it is a useful example as their various activities overlap with some of the core themes associated with this option. The activities at Dairy Farmers of Canada include promotion, education, marketing and product certification. The organization structure consists of a board of directors and members (various small-scale organizations and large/medium producers/corporations). This organization is legislated by the government.

6.0 PARTNERSHIP - UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION

This option would entail a collaborative partnership between industry and an existing non-profit or similar organization. This option reduces the labour of developing a governance model, instead seeking partnership with an organization that operates within a similar value set of those in the regional cannabis industry.

Funding availability for this option is dependent on the partner organization. While there is currently a high number of funding options for BC Societies, whether these would be pursued is hinged on the decision of the partner organization and their existing funding priorities. At the same time, depending on the partner organization they may have access to existing funding that could support project activities without grant funding.

6.1 BENEFITS

6.1.1. Reduced Scope of Work and Cost

This operation would likely require significantly less predevelopment work and might accelerate timelines from project ideation to implementation. Partnering with an existing organization would also reduce the cost of start-up and ongoing costs.

6.1.2. Collaboration and Innovation

In addition to this, collaborative partnerships have the potential to open more opportunities for innovation and allow for expansive networks. Partnerships can be diverse in approach. There is potential opportunity to negotiate the most preferred outcome.

6.1.3. Focus

By working with an existing organization, the industry group may have more capacity to design and deliver a focused pilot project, with less time spent on the preliminary phases of alternative governance models.

6.2 CHALLENGES

6.2.1. Less Autonomy

With this option industry players may have less control over planning, implementation and outcomes of projects. The partner organization will likely fundraise on behalf of the project/initiative group, which places even more limits on the autonomy of industry players and requires significant trust in the partner organization to convey the proposal with clarity and respect to the organizers.

6.2.2. Terms of Agreement

This option would require a formal agreement with an existing organization. The delivery of any projects and initiatives would likely be subject to funding success; should funding not be secured, the proposed projects and agreements may be subject to termination.

6.3 FORMING A PARTNERSHIP

To successfully develop and deliver a partnership-based project or initiative, the process begins with research to identify organizations whose values and goals align with the proposed work. Building on existing relationships or establishing new connections with key individuals within these organizations helps build trust and open communication. With these relationships in place, project plans and proposals can be developed collaboratively to ensure they are mutually beneficial. Throughout the implementation phase, players should maintain a collaborative and supportive relationship with the organization to ensure the successful delivery of the project.

6.4 ESTIMATED KEY COSTS

6.4.1 Minimal Costs

There are no immediate or formal costs related to pursuing a partnership option.

6.5 EXAMPLES

6.5.1 Cowichan Industry X Craft Cannabis Association of BC

In 2025, the [Craft Cannabis Association of BC](#) in partnership with individuals within the Cowichan industry received funding to develop a cannabis trail through the BC Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program ([REDIP](#)). Details pertaining to this project have yet to be published publicly.

6.5.2. [Citizen-led Economic Development Study](#) (Ipsen, et al. 2006). Though this study focuses on accessibility and inclusion, it demonstrates the success of collaboration between citizen groups (e.g., industry) and sponsorship agencies (e.g., umbrella organizations) to deliver impactful rural economic development projects.

6.5.3 Case Study: BC Apples Marketing Strategy

In 2024, the [BC Fruit Growers Association](#) established a committee [to form a marketing plan around the regional apple industry](#). This initiative was led by a dedicated sub-committee known as the Project Management Committee. To ensure the strategy reflected industry needs and opportunities, over 200 apple growers were involved in the engagement sessions. The effort was driven by growing concerns over the degradation of the BC apple brand and a recognized opportunity to revitalize the brand.

6.6 POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP OPTIONS

This section contains a short list of the types of organizations to consider for partnership:

- Municipal Governments.
- Academic Institutions.
- Economic Development Organizations.
- Community Service Societies.

7.0 SHARED INVESTMENT OPTION: JOINT BROKERAGE ACCOUNT

A joint brokerage account is a type of investment account that allows access and investments from multiple persons on the account. This type of account is typically formed between family members and would require significant trust between owners outside of a personal relationship (Edward Jones, n.d.). Any effort regarding joint investment would be best supported by establishing a legal entity, which is why it should be embedded into the various structures, to ensure mechanisms for accountability.

Considerations pertaining to this option:

- How can we manage access and/or control of the funds in a joint brokerage account?
- What is the investment timeline and how does it related to project timelines? (e.g., if we want to deliver projects in the next five years, how would a ten-year investment plan support that?)
- This is limited to only investment funds rather than potentially uncapped funding through grants (subject to funding success).
- There is volatility with investment banking; how would people respond to losses when participating in higher-risk banking?

8.0 RELEVANCE TO PILOT PROJECTS

The purpose of the following table is to provide a high-level assessment of the relative suitability of various governance models in relation to the proposed pilot projects. It is intended as a preliminary overview and does not reflect the current stage of consensus or detailed planning for each pilot. When interpreting this table, readers are encouraged to also consider the broader context and findings presented throughout this report.

The table uses a low-to-high rating scale to evaluate each pilot project against key criteria associated with the governance models explored in this report. These criteria include funding potential, alignment with project goals, capacity for collaboration and democratic decision-making, legal feasibility, and implementation costs. Please note that the ratings are approximate and partially subjective, based on the project team’s experience and the evolving nature of pilot planning.

8.1 TABLE OF RELEVANCE

	Pilot - Regional “Badge”	Pilot: Digital Hub	Pilot: Storytelling	Pilot: International Delegation
	Rating of Potential Relevance (from Low to High)			
Co-operative Association	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Non-profit Model: BC Society	High	High	High	Medium
BC Benefit Company	Low	Low	Low	Low
Industry Alliance	High	Medium	High	Medium
Regional Marketing Board	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
Partnership/ Umbrella	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
Shared Investment: Joint Brokerage Account	None	None	None	None

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