

## Canadian Co-op Association Education Manager Finds Happiness in Change, Invention

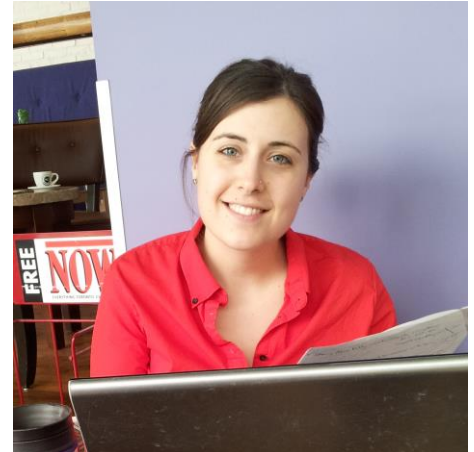
Erin Hancock counts herself lucky. She is working in her dream job at a time when many new projects have come to fruition. “I love new beginnings,” she says.

She is the new manager of research and education of the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA). Many of her responsibilities are recent projects, including the Canadian Co-operative Research Network - Réseau canadien de recherche sur les coopératives (CCRN-RCRC) that has just marked a year since its launch as an online news and resource hub.

She started as a camper at a co-op youth leadership retreat in Atlantic Canada 15 years ago. As a master’s student at the University of New Brunswick, she undertook research on co-op policy in the province, and helped establish the Co-operative Enterprise Council of New Brunswick which continues as the voice for cooperators, co-ops and credit unions. She served as a co-op developer as part of the Mobilizing Youth for the Delivery of Advisory Services Worker Co-op Ltd., served on the board of NASCO four years, and completed a research scan for the fledgling New University Co-operative incorporated in 2008 with a goal of opening a campus in Nova Scotia. From 2006 to 2009, she was a research assistant of the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network in New Brunswick, focusing on cooperatives, non-profits, charities and social enterprises.

It was during her many cooperative activities that friends told her that her ideal job was posted; (Hancock says she was vocal about her desire to work for the national organization). She applied and got her start as the program coordinator for the Community-University Research Alliance and Research, Education and Co-operation Hub at CCA.

The CCRN-RCRC has been her largest project at CCA, says Hancock. She knows the concept of developing a network has been discussed by cooperators for many years, but additional funding and research made the difference. She explains that Agriculture and Agrifood Canada invested in a project to survey co-op researchers and practitioners to discover gaps in research about cooperative organizations. What was found were some misperceptions, explains Hancock. Where people would identify a gap, there was often existing research. This pointed toward a need for a better system of connecting researchers and sharing new publications. Through mentorship by the Canadian Rural Research Network and the assistance of a steering committee of top researchers and practitioners, CCRN-RCRC was created. The network had its first annual meeting in April, and is seeking input from outside Canada and others to add their profiles (<http://s.coop/profiles>) as they map research expertise within the cooperative sector. “As long as we keep the site relevant and add new information each week, we keep up our end of the bargain,” she says; “we invite others to participate through sharing their publications and events, adding profiles, following news and sharing the resource with colleagues.” Hancock is the chair of the Management Committee.



Erin Hancock, research and education manager of the Canadian Co-operative Association, says she is happy to be a knowledge worker helping to launch new online resources needed by Canada’s cooperators, educators and researchers.

A complementary project is the Measuring the Co-operative Difference Research Network, that takes stock of the impact of cooperatives on communities. Hancock assists the Management Committee, manages the network's website ([www.cooperativedifference.coop](http://www.cooperativedifference.coop)) and webinar series, and produces its quarterly newsletter. This led her to the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation, whose members are primarily researchers and instructors, where she is vice president.

Her new CCA position further confirms a change in direction for the organization, adds Hancock. There was a time that CCA didn't provide members with education and research, except in select contexts. "CCA is looked to more and more as a resource and catalyst for research and education," notes Hancock.

A big help to new employees and directors is a free online orientation program launched last year. By visiting virtual 'Co-op Main Street' on the site, users "discover the co-operative difference", the name of the program, Hancock explains.

She says that she'll have the opportunity of more change soon. CCA and its French language counterpart, Conseil canadien de la coopération et de la mutualité, recently announced their intentions to create a new French/English language pan-Canadian organization that will unite their services.

Hancock presented at the ACE Institute in Puerto Rico in August. In addition to describing her projects, she outlined new research that catalogs educational resources of Canadian cooperatives. The conference will hopefully lead to new ideas and partnerships: "So much wisdom is coming out of the United States and we are getting more interest from (outside Canada) about our activities too."

###