

WORKER CO-OPS: AN INTRODUCTION

Canadian Worker Co-op Federation

Session #1 (of 2)

Presented by Hazel Corcoran, Executive Director

Introductions

- Who are you, in what worker co-op do you work, what attracted you to this worker co-op/job?
- When your friends ask you “what is a worker co-op?” what do you tell them?
- For you, what is the most important thing about working in a worker co-op?



Global Co-op Movement: a Few Facts

- Co-operative enterprises worldwide employ 250 million people
- Generate 2.2 trillion USD in turnover/revenue while providing the services and infrastructure society needs to thrive.
- In France 21,000 co-ops provide over 1,000,000 jobs
- In Canada 4 in every 10 Canadians are Co-op Members

Co-operative Employment Estimate International Coop Alliance

CONTINENT	CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2	CATEGORY 3	TOTAL
	EMPLOYEES	WORKER-MEMBERS	PRODUCER-MEMBERS (INCLUDING THEIR EMPLOYEES WHEN DATA WAS AVAILABLE)	
EUROPE (31)	4,627,853	1,231,102	10,132,252	15,991,207
AFRICA (13)	1,467,914	237	5,715,212	7,183,363
ASIA (14)	7,734,113	8,200,505	204,749,940	220,684,558
AMERICAS (15)	1,762,797	1,409,608	3,048,249	6,220,654
OCEANIA (1)	26,038	No available data	34,592	60,630
TOTAL	15,618,715	10,841,452	223,680,245	250,140,412

Worker Coop Employment

CICOPA Estimate 2013-14

Continents	Worker-members	Producer-members
Africa	237 (1)	29,735 (1)
Asia	8,200,505 (9)	3,946,916 (7)
Europe	1,231,102 (15)	546,000 (2)
N. America	60,630 (2)	
S. America	1,348,978 (12)	1,296,850 (6)
TOTAL	10,841,452	5,819,501

International Coop Alliance

Statement of Co-op Identity

- Definition

A co-operative is an **autonomous association of persons** united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Definition - Comment

- It is people voluntarily coming together to meet their needs and aspirations that forms the basis for a co-op
- For a worker co-op the key need is viable and fulfilling employment for the members.
- However for most worker co-ops, it is not just employment but rather the whole vision of what the co-op is contributing to society as well as the way it is doing it.
- The most successful co-ops are those driven by the passion the members have for the work they do. (**Needs and aspirations**)

Who Starts Worker Co-ops

- “Co-operators” believe that co-operation is a good in itself which supports the development of the people in the organization and those whom it serves.
- They support the development of people through meeting their needs and aspirations using a particular model of **enterprise**.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbZ8ojEuN5I&list=PLPJpiw1WYdTMPSQpXK-TesGDsV_WLoI_h

What is an enterprise anyway?

- Merriam Webster Dictionary
- 1. a **project or undertaking** that is **especially difficult, complicated, or risky**
- 2. **readiness to engage** in daring or difficult action : initiative <showed great enterprise in dealing with the crisis>
- 3. a unit of economic organization or activity; especially:
a) **business organization** b) **a systematic purposeful activity**
- *Summary - People taking initiative to organize collectively to pursue a particular objective(s) within a changing and uncertain environment. (**Difficulty and risk are inherent**)*

Canadian Examples

- Just Us Coffee Roasters
 - <http://www.justuscoffee.com>
- Sustainability Solutions Group
 - www.ssg.coop
- Organic Planet
 - <http://www.organicplanet.coop/wp>
- Multi-cultural Health Brokers
 - <http://www.mchb.org/>

Just Us Coffee Roaster Co-op

- Our Purpose: People and the Planet before Profits TM
- We are a worker co-operative that contributes to a sane world where peoples' needs and the wellbeing of our planet are put before greed.
- Building on our success, we continue to foster a more democratic workplace and supply chain, where everyone can participate and benefit. This is an important struggle that will take commitment on everyone's part.
- Our efforts are focused on small-scale sustainable agriculture working towards healthy communities and a healthy world. Through our fair trade products and education, we promote awareness on development and trade issues, always looking for a way to be a vehicle for change.

Sustainability Solutions Group

- SSG delivers pioneering, holistic projects that address society's most pressing needs
- It works with those who can make the greatest positive change to create thriving communities
- Examples of Services
 - Community Planning & Engagement
 - Energy & Emissions Modelling and Planning
 - Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation Modelling and Planning

Multi-Cultural Health Brokers

- A group of 75 Multicultural Health Brokers.
- Represent 25 different cultural and linguistic communities in Edmonton.
- MCHB have a holistic approach towards health, and honour the families and work with them as long as they need us.
- Many of their client families are new to Canada, and need support to bridge between their own knowledge from their home country and Canada's health, social services, education, justice, immigration and employment support systems.

Organic Planet

- Organic Planet is committed to supplying Winnipeg with fresh produce, groceries, gluten-free goods, non-toxic health & beauty products and provide an organic and vegan deli
- Whenever possible, Organic Planet purchases from local producers and from other co-ops. Fairly traded and organic products are preferred, as are smaller, more independent suppliers.
- We're committed to the principles of Community Economic Development, and building a stronger, more self-sufficient community.

Co-operative Values

- Co-operatives are based on the values of **self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity** and **solidarity**.
- In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of **honesty, openness, social responsibility** and **caring for others**.

Value Commitments

- Self-help Self-responsibility – personal initiative
- **Democracy, equality and equity** – interpersonal & governance relations
- **Solidarity** – the emotional glue – commitment to make it work!
- **Honesty and openness** – personal & collective initiative – supports 2 & 3
- **Social responsibility and caring for others** – commitment to broad social realities as well as internal relations
- **What are the two values you think are the most important for the success of your co-op?**

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

- Co-operatives are **voluntary organisations**, open to all **persons able to use their services** and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, **without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination**.
- *It is important to note here that the key service used in the worker co-op is employment and therefore the membership while open and non-discriminatory is usually limited to the people that work for the worker co-op.*

2. Democratic Member Control

- Co-operatives are **democratic organisations controlled by their members**, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. **Men and women serving as elected representatives** are accountable to the membership. **In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote)** and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.
- *In a worker co-op (a primary co-op) each member has one vote. The members elect a board of directors that are accountable to the members. For this democracy to be effective following the Co-operative Values is essential as is the necessity the members take their responsibility to participate seriously.*

3. Member Economic Participation

- Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Why does Principle 3 Matter?

- *This principle expresses the fundamental economic difference between a worker co-op and a traditional business.*
- *In a worker co-op capital is the servant of the co-operative.*
- *Returns on capital are always subordinate to the primary way of sharing the surplus (profits) between the members which is based upon amount of work they have contributed to the co-operative*

4. Autonomy and Independence

- **Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members.** If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, **they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.**
- *This principle emphasizes that as an independent enterprise a worker co-op depends upon its members' commitment and hard work for its success. It is no one else's job. It also indicates how important it is that any agreement made to secure capital for the co-op's operations should be on terms which ensure the members remain in control of the co-op.*

5. Education, Training and Information

- Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.
- To run a worker co-op successfully the members must have many skills. Few members come to a worker co-op with all these skills, so to succeed the co-op must ensure that the members, directors and managers get the training they need to fully contribute to the success of the co-op.

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives

- Co-operatives **serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together** through local, national, regional and international structures.
- *In the same way the members of a worker co-op benefit from their mutual efforts, their co-op can benefit from co-operating with other co-operatives often by forming service federations with similar co-ops. For worker co-ops the CWCF is such a federation and provides benefits to its members in the areas of training, financing and information sharing while also securing grants that are accessible for member projects.*

7. Concern for Community

- Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.
- *Worker co-ops must always remember that they are ultimately dependent upon their larger community and the natural environment. In all activities designed to meet their own needs they should consider how to carry them out in a sustainable fashion that strengthens their communities.*

Co-operative Vision

- What kind of world, work place, and social contribution is your co-op trying to create?
- What are the common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations that your co-op seeks to fulfil?
- Do you know if your co-op has a vision and mission? If so what is it? If not, by looking at how it behaves – describe the vision you think it is following.
- How and when do you think your co-op should reconsider or change its vision and mission?

Closing

- If you were to share one thing from this session with the members of your co-operative, what would it be and why do you think it is worth sharing (What difference could it make in your co-operative's life?)
- Evaluation – What did you like about today's session? How could it be improved?
- Thanks for participating!