



# Democracy at Work Institute

US FEDERATION OF  
WORKER COOPERATIVES



## 2015 Press Kit



Democracy at Work  
Institute US FEDERATION OF  
WORKER COOPERATIVES



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# About Worker Cooperatives

## What is a worker cooperative?

A worker cooperative is a values-driven business that puts worker and community benefit at the core of its purpose. The two central characteristics of worker cooperatives are:

1. workers own the business and they participate in its financial success on the basis of their labor contribution to the cooperative
2. workers have representation on and vote for the board of directors, adhering to the principle of one worker, one vote

*“Any business can be a worker-owned and -controlled business.”*

In addition to their economic and governance participation, worker-owners often manage the day-to-day operations through various management structures.

## A brief history of worker cooperatives in the United States

Though we don't yet have comprehensive data on the nature and scope of worker cooperatives in the U.S., researchers and practitioners estimate that there are 300-400 democratic workplaces in the United States, employing around 7,000 people and generating over \$400 million in annual revenues. The number of worker cooperatives has grown steadily over the past 20 years, and is made up of both well-established businesses and new, growing ones, increasingly including some businesses that have been sold to their employees by their owners.

Any business can be a worker-owned and -controlled business. In the U.S., worker cooperatives tend to be concentrated in the service and retail sectors. Common industries include accommodation and food service, health care, manufacturing and engineering, technology, and design. Many of the worker cooperatives in existence today were inspired by the Mondragon

Cooperatives in Spain, which enabled the Basques to lift themselves out of poverty and build what is today Spain's 7th largest corporation, a worker cooperative.

Worker cooperatives are currently experiencing a surge in popularity, marked by industry and sector concentrations and the growth of a support infrastructure that includes financing, technical assistance providers and trade associations at the local, regional and national levels.

Interest in worker cooperatives as a job creation and wealth-building strategy is also on the rise, with community organizations, cities, and small business advocates seeing potential in the form to build a more inclusive economy.

This recent growth in the worker cooperative sector can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, when all of today's largest worker cooperatives were founded, as part of an explosion in alternative economic forms. Those cooperatives that survived have thrived, and have helped seed new growth through investment of capital and expertise in a second wave of worker cooperative development starting in the late 1990s. By 2000, several worker cooperative development organizations had begun to have success using the form as means to create good jobs for low- and moderate-income workforces, from home care to housecleaning.

*“Those cooperatives that survived have thrived, and have helped seed new growth through investment of capital and expertise in a second wave of worker cooperative development starting in the late 1990s.”*

In 2004, the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC, <http://usworker.coop>) was formed as the national membership organization for worker cooperatives, an outgrowth of local and regional organizing across the country. In 2013, the USFWC launched the Democracy at Work Institute, to

advance a strategic vision for growth in the worker cooperative sector, and to expand the promise of worker cooperatives to new communities while keeping this new growth grounded in worker cooperatives themselves.

## Worker cooperative facts and figures

- Number of worker cooperatives in the US: 300-400
- Total number of people working at worker cooperatives in the US: approximately 7,000
- Total annual revenues generated by worker cooperatives in the US: \$400 million
- Average size of a US worker cooperative: 50 people (the median is 10 people)
- Largest US worker co-op: Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), over 2,000 workers
- Number of US worker cooperatives formed since the start of the 21st century: over 150
- Percentage of US worker cooperatives that began as traditional for-profit enterprises: 26%
- Percentage of US worker cooperatives that have annual revenues over \$1 million: 31%
- Average annual profit margin for a worker cooperative in the US: 6.4%
- Worker cooperatives structures: 46% incorporate under cooperative statutes, 26% operate as LLCs and the remainder are C-corporations, partnerships, and other.

## Why are Worker Cooperatives Important?

Worker cooperatives are values-driven businesses that put worker and community benefit at the core of their purpose. In contrast to traditional companies, workers at worker cooperatives participate in the profits, oversight, and often management of the organization using democratic practices. Workers own the majority of the equity in the business, and control the voting shares.

The model has proven to be an effective tool for creating and maintaining sustainable, dignified jobs; generating wealth; improving the quality of life of workers; and promoting community and local economic development, particularly for people who lack access to business ownership or even sustainable work options. According to United for a Fair Economy: "One of the main barriers to business ownership for people of color is access to start-up

capital.... [Worker cooperatives make] business ownership more accessible." (Source: State of the Dream 2013)

## The United States is facing unprecedented levels of inequality

We know that growing inequality is bad for families, for social cohesion, and ultimately for the economy itself. Lack of economic and social mobility undermines the promise of our democratic institutions.

Bringing more stakeholders in to share the fruits of successful business can be a key to addressing inequality. By placing workers' needs before investors' profits, successful worker cooperatives democratize wealth rather than concentrating it.

Through sharing risk, cooperatives make business ownership possible for entrepreneurs of all backgrounds. They build skills and participation in the workforce. Shared ownership can even be a means of preserving small businesses and saving good jobs when owners retire.

A growing consensus recognizes worker cooperatives as a timely and powerful tool for stabilizing jobs, expanding ownership opportunities, and reorienting business toward broad-based prosperity. According to the New York Times, "Support for full-fledged co-ops has inched into the mainstream as communities have grown weary of

*"At a worker cooperative, profits do not go to distant investors, but instead go directly to the workers."*

waiting for private investors to create good jobs – or sick of watching them take jobs away." (3/23/14)

In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, unemployment soared, leaving many individuals and families unable to meet their most basic

needs. The jobs created during the resulting Great Recession are often low-wage and part-time, an inadequate replacement for the full-time jobs lost. We are also in the midst of a much longer economic trend toward a service economy that keeps workers contingent and without benefits while concentrating wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer CEOs and shareholders.

A recent report released by the Aspen Institute concluded that "upward mobility into the middle class remains a possibility for fewer and fewer low-income people," and the numbers are alarming:

- The top 10% used to earn 1/3 of total income; it now takes in 1/2.
- The average CEO now earns 273 times more than the average worker.
- The top 1% has a net worth 288 times higher than the typical family (a record in the United States)

## **Worker cooperatives build local wealth**

At a worker cooperative, profits do not go to distant investors, but instead go directly to the workers. As a result, the money stays grounded in the local economy, building community wealth. With ownership in the hands of workers, who are usually living and spending locally, these companies stay connected and accountable to their communities.

## **Worker cooperatives create quality jobs**

Workers have a meaningful role in the business, as they contribute to and benefit from the success of a company they co-own. Jobs at worker cooperatives tend to be longer-term, offer extensive skills training, and provide better wages than similar jobs in conventional companies. Furthermore, worker cooperatives offer opportunities for greater participation in management and governance decisions that help the business succeed.

## **Worker cooperatives create meaningful change for underserved populations**

The New York Times concludes, "by placing workers' needs ahead of profits, they address the root cause of economic disparity." (3/23/14) More than half of worker cooperatives in the United States today were designed to improve low-wage jobs and build wealth in communities most directly affected by inequality, helping vulnerable workers build skills and earning potential, household income and assets.

## Examples Worker Cooperatives and Development Organizations

A full listing of worker cooperatives in the U.S. can be found at [www.institute.usworker.coop/find-a-coop](http://www.institute.usworker.coop/find-a-coop).

### Established worker cooperatives



#### *Alvarado Street Bakery*

Alvarado Street Bakery manufactures baked goods using primarily whole grain and organic ingredients, which are distributed nationally as well as to Canada and Japan. Located in Sonoma County, California, the bakery has been a worker cooperative since 1981. The company currently employs over 100 people and distributes over 30 products.

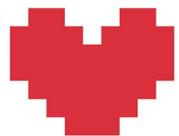
<http://www.alvaradostreetbakery.com/>



#### *Black Star Co-op Pub and Brewery*

Based in Austin, Texas, Black Star – a consumer cooperative with a democratic workers collective – is a brewpub that is owned by more than 3,000 individuals and organizations and democratically managed by workers through a Worker's Assembly. The co-op currently employs 27 workers including 18 who have fully invested voting rights.

<http://www.blackstar.coop/>



**COLAB**  
cooperative

#### *Colab Coop*

Colab Coop is a design and programming technology company founded in 2011 that specializes in working with values-driven organizations including the Human Rights Campaign, the National Resource Defense Council, Emerson College, and others. Based in Ithaca, New York, Colab Coop currently has approximately 20 people on their team.

<http://www.colab.coop/>



#### *Equal Exchange*

Founded in 1986, Equal Exchange is a well-known national distributor and retailer of fair trade, organic goods based in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts with over 100 workers. Best known for their coffee, Equal Exchange also specializes in tea, sugar, bananas, avocados, cocoa, and chocolate bars. The goods are produced by farmer cooperatives in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

<http://www.equalexchange.coop/>



#### *Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing*

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing (IEM) has worked with clients to develop custom automation equipment and systems since 1980. The company currently has over 30 worker-owners.

<http://www.isthmuseng.com/>



### *Weaver Street Market*

Weaver Street Market is a multistakeholder grocery store and community center with three locations in North Carolina. Founded in 1988 with around 200 members, the grocery store now has over 18,000 members and 175 employee-owners.

<http://www.weaverstreetmarket.coop/>

## **Conversions of existing businesses**

### *Namaste Solar*



Based in Boulder, Colorado, Namasté Solar was founded in 2005 to provide residential and commercial solar services. The company chose to restructure as a worker cooperative in 2011 to better align the company's capital structure with its governance structure. Prior to the transition, the company operated on a one person, one vote basis for most operational decisions, but when it came to shareholder votes, decisions were made on a one share, one vote basis. The cooperative model more closely matched the democratic ideals and more equitably distributes the risk/reward equation of the company's employee-owners. In addition, this enabled the company to accept external investors without sacrificing internal control.

<http://www.namastesolar.com/>

### *Select Machine, Inc.*



Founded in 1994 by Doug Beavers and Bill Sagaser, Select Machine manufactures, sells, and distributes machined products and equipment for installation on construction and demolition equipment. When the founders started looking to sell the business, several interested potential buyers surfaced, but all of them wanted to buy the business for its customer list and equipment, and consolidate production into under-utilized facilities elsewhere. Shutting the plant and leaving their employees out of work was not an acceptable outcome for the founders, who then started exploring alternatives to a traditional sale. After research, they determined that a worker cooperative was the best option for their company, and transitioned in 2011.

### *South Mountain Company*



South Mountain Company is a 37 year old design and build company located on Martha's Vineyard. The business began as a partnership in 1975 and then became a sole proprietorship owned by the company's co-founder, president and CEO John Abrams in 1984. After a period of unexpected growth, the company experienced a cultural shift and began to considering restructuring. The leadership team determined they wanted a structure that distributed both ownership and control to committed employees, and decided that a worker cooperative was the best fit. The company, which converted to a worker cooperative in 1987, currently employs over 30 people, 18 of whom are currently worker-owners.

<http://www.southmountain.com/>

## Cooperative development organizations



Center for  
Family Life  
in Sunset Park  
SCO Family of Services

### *Center for Family Life*

The Center for Family Life is a program of the SCO Family of Services, a New York social service nonprofit with more than 90 programs. The Center is a neighborhood-based family and social-services organization with roots in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The Center has developed four cooperative businesses – in housecleaning, babysitting and child care, elder care, and dog walking and pet care – to create living wage jobs in a safe environment, and provide social supports and educational opportunities for their members. Each of these successful business ventures has its own website and is owned and operated by the members themselves.

<http://sco.org/programs/center-for-family-life/>



Quality Care  
THROUGH  
Quality Jobs

### *PHI/Cooperative Home Care Associates*

Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA) is the largest worker cooperative in the United States with over 2,000 workers. The cooperative was developed by a social service agency in 1985 as part of a strategy to improve the low-wage occupation of the homecare industry. In the 1990s, an independent nonprofit, the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI), was formed to provide training and support to help CHCA grow and thrive. PHI and CHCA work together to offer an employer-based workforce development program that provides free training for 600 low-income and underemployed women annually.

<http://www.chcany.org/>



### *Prospera*

Prospera (formerly Women's Action to Gain Economic Security, or WAGES) is a nonprofit organization that has incubated five Bay Area worker-cooperatives in the green cleaning industry. The cooperatives provide above-market incomes, benefits, and workforce and financial training to its 92 members, who are 95% immigrant, 100% Latina, and 90% from below the poverty line. Prospera is now supporting development in new sectors, and is preparing to launch a food cooperative in 2015.

<http://prosperacoops.org>



### *The Arizmendi Association*

The Arizmendi Association of Cooperatives serves as a network, incubator, and technical assistance provider to six well-known bakeries in the Bay Area. The original bakery was the Cheese Board Collective, a retail artisanal cheese and bread store that developed independently, becoming a worker cooperative in 1971. The Association came together to replicate the Cheese Board, and in the process create as many good jobs as possible. The five subsequent bakeries have used Cheese Board's recipes, organizational structure, and goodwill to build successful businesses connected to the Association, but independently owned by each bakery's cooperative members. Together the six bakeries now employ approximately 200 workers.

<http://www.arizmendi.coop/>

## City Governments Using Worker Cooperatives as an Economic Development Strategy

A growing consensus recognizes worker cooperatives and employee-owned companies as a timely and powerful tool for stabilizing jobs, expanding ownership opportunities, and reorienting business toward broad-based prosperity. According to the New York Times, “Support for full-fledged co-ops has inched into the mainstream as communities have grown weary of waiting for private investors to create good jobs - or sick of watching them take jobs away.” Multiple cities have already launched initiatives that build and preserve small businesses and good jobs with worker cooperatives.

### New York City

On June 26th, the New York City Council voted to approve the city’s annual budget, which contains a \$1.2 million initiative to fund the development of worker cooperatives.

This investment – the largest to date by a city government – represents an endorsement of worker cooperatives as a means of creating quality jobs and anchoring businesses in local communities. Melissa Hoover, the executive director of the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) and the Democracy at Work Institute stated, “This is a great step forward for worker cooperatives. The City Council’s full funding of the coalition’s initiative in its first year of the request – with the support of so many city councilors and city agencies – shows that they understand cooperatives can be a viable tool for economic development that creates real opportunity. We hope to see similar community wealth building initiatives passed in cities around the country.”

A broad coalition – including both established and emerging cooperative developers, public officials, non-profits and community members – came together to drive the budget initiative forward. The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies convened the coalition which includes USFWC members: Center for Family Life, New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives, Ecomundo Cleaning, the Working World, Green Worker Cooperatives, and the Democracy at Work Institute.

Other partners included newly launched cooperative development projects and solidarity economy support organizations such as Make the Road New York and the New Economy Project.

New York City is home to the largest worker cooperative in the country. Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), based in the Bronx, is a living demonstration of the potential of worker cooperatives to create more dignified, higher paying jobs while having a positive impact on an industry. CHCA’s 2000+ worker-owners are home care providers’ whose wages and benefits have risen more than 40% in the past five years, and their turnover is 15% in an industry with 60%+ annual turnover. Another New York City success story is Sí Se Puede Women’s Cooperative – a 60-women cleaning company based in Sunset Park whose members have raised their wages and moved from a position of precarious employment to small business ownership – made another compelling case for the city council, showing how immigrants can use worker cooperatives to build wealth through dignified jobs.

The \$1.2 million budget for the program will be divided among groups already developing cooperatives in New York City. Funds will also support new efforts to develop cooperatives around anchor institutions’ procurement, and to help business owners sell to their employees. Moving forward, this coalition will seek city-wide policy changes to lower barriers for worker cooperatives.

Coalition members have already had supportive meetings with the city's Economic Development Corporation and Small Business Services Department.

## **Austin, Texas**

After several years as the Austin Cooperative Think-Tank, the Austin Cooperative Business Association (ACBA) was formed to provide coordinated support for the growing cooperative community in the city. ACBA, a joint project between Austin-area cooperatives of various sectors (including consumer, housing, financial and worker) and the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), aims to benefit and expand cooperative businesses in Central Texas.

Through coordinated advocacy efforts during the summer of 2014, ACBA worked to get the Austin City Council to pass a resolution in support of cooperative businesses. The city resolution also included a directive for the city government to research how best to support local cooperative enterprise development. ASBC provided expert support for the local research and managed to secure the City's support with the inclusion of \$60,000 in the 2015 city budget to support cooperative businesses in Austin. For more information: <http://www.acba.coop>

## **Cleveland, Ohio**

Launched in 2008 by a working group of Cleveland-based institutions - including the Cleveland Foundation, the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, Case Western Reserve University, and the municipal government - the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative is working to create living wage jobs in six low-income neighborhoods through worker cooperatives. The businesses include Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, the greenest industrial laundry in Northeast Ohio; Ohio Cooperative Solar, which provides solar installation and energy retrofitting; and Green City Growers, a 10-acre hydroponic greenhouse that will supply grocery chains, wholesalers, and food service companies within a 150-mile radius.

## **Madison, Wisconsin**

Wisconsin has a long history of cooperative enterprises. The City of Madison's mayor, Paul Soglin, has been a supporter since his first stint as mayor in the 1970's. With the resurgence of interest in cooperatives, Mayor Soglin hosted the Madison Cooperative Business Conference in the summer of 2012 in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives. Designed to provide information on the local cooperative business community, cooperative best practices and a discussion on how to advance business cooperatives in Madison, the well-attended event re-energized local support for the business model. This conference was the catalyst for the Mayor's most recent commitment to cooperative development in the city. The 2016 - 2020 city budget, passed in November 2014, included \$5 million for cooperative development (\$1 million per year for five years). Local cooperative members and ally organizations are spending 2015 assisting with the development of the cooperative business initiative, which will officially launch in 2016.

## **Richmond, California**

The former Mayor of Richmond, Gayle McLaughlin (now a City Council member), visited Mondragon, Spain on a tour of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, known as the largest worker-cooperative in the world. Returning to Richmond, determined to use the worker cooperative model as an economic tool for revitalization in her city marked by urban poverty, McLaughlin convinced City Council to allocate \$50,000 in 2012 for a one-year pilot project to test strategies for worker cooperative enterprise development in the city. While the city funding was not renewed after the pilot year, two non-government projects were. Private citizens established the Richmond Worker Cooperative Revolving Loan Fund ([www.richmondcooploans.net](http://www.richmondcooploans.net)) and a local foundation provided seed funding to write a business plan for a local cooperative enterprise incubator. The business plan is currently in development.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ▪ **What is a cooperative?**

A cooperative is an entity that is owned and controlled by its members, which operates for their benefit. The cooperative landscape includes (among other types)

- agricultural and producer cooperatives,
- consumer cooperatives,
- housing cooperatives,
- rural electric cooperatives, and
- worker cooperatives

The entire cooperative sector in the United States is represented by the National Cooperative Business Association (<http://www.ncba.coop>). The International Cooperative Alliance provides a cooperative definition, list of values, and principles on its website: <http://ica.coop>.

### ▪ **What is a worker cooperative?**

A worker cooperative is a business that is owned and controlled by its workers, who constitute the members of the cooperative. The two central characteristics of worker cooperatives are:

1. workers own the business and they participate in its financial success on the basis of their labor contribution to the cooperative
2. workers have representation on and vote for the board of directors, adhering to the principle of one worker, one vote

In addition to their economic and governance participation, worker-owners often manage the day-to-day operations through various management structures. The worker cooperative sector in the United States is represented by the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives ([usworker.coop](http://usworker.coop)) and an international apex organization, CICOPA ([cicopa.coop](http://cicopa.coop)), represents the global worker cooperative community.

### ▪ **What is a multi-stakeholder cooperative?**

A multi-stakeholder cooperative is a cooperative that has more than one class of members. For example, a grocery store might have consumer members and worker members. The different classes of members might have different rights to participate in the surplus (or profits) of the company, and different roles in decision-making. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives can come in many different forms and structure the business in a variety of ways. A recent trend is the development of multi-stakeholder food coops in local food systems.

### ▪ **How many worker cooperatives are there in the US?**

Though we don't yet have comprehensive data on the nature and scope of worker cooperatives in the U.S., researchers and practitioners conservatively estimate that there are over 300 democratic workplaces in the United States, employing approximately 7,000 people and generating over \$400 million in annual revenues. The number of workers cooperatives has grown steadily over the past 20 years, and is made up of both well-established businesses and new, growing ones, including some businesses that have been sold to their employees by their owners. A comprehensive census of worker cooperatives is currently underway.

### ▪ **How big is the typical worker cooperative?**

The majority of worker cooperatives in the United States are small businesses, with between 5 and 50 workers, but there are a few notable larger enterprises with between 150 and 500 workers. The largest worker cooperative in the United States is Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), a home care agency with over 2,000 workers based in the Bronx, New York.

- **What industries are worker cooperatives in?**

Any business can be a worker-owned and -controlled business. Worker co-ops have been successful in many different sectors and industries. Some examples are:

- **Service** - housecleaning, day labor, restaurants, taxis, childcare
- **Retail** - grocery stores, bakeries, bookstores, bike shops
- **Health care** - nursing, home health care, clinics, bodywork
- **Skilled trades** - printing, plumbing, woodworking, contracting
- **Manufacturing and engineering** - machine parts, fabricating
- **Technology** - web hosting, networking, voice and data systems
- **Education** - charter schools, teacher/student/parent-run schools
- **Media and the arts** - designers, galleries, performers, publishers

- **Where are worker cooperatives geographically in the United States?**

Worker cooperatives exist across the country, with the greatest concentrations in the Northeast, the West Coast and the Upper Midwest.

- **Is there a standard legal form that worker cooperatives take?**

There is no uniform cooperative code in the United States, and definitions and incorporation guidelines vary from state to state. As a result, worker cooperatives can incorporate in a number of different ways. In states where there are cooperative incorporation codes, such as Massachusetts and California, businesses can incorporate as worker cooperatives. In states where there are no such laws, a worker cooperative can incorporate as a C corporation, S corporation, LLC, flexible purpose corporation, or any other corporate form, as long as the company meets the minimum requirements of operating as a worker cooperative.

- **What is the difference between a worker cooperative and an employee-owned (ESOP) company?**

Although the term employee-owned can be used to describe many different business structures (including worker cooperatives), it is most commonly used to describe companies with an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP). An ESOP is a federally governed benefit plan (like a 401(k) or profit sharing plan) that can be used to share an ownership stake with employees. While an ESOP company can be 100% owned by its employees and operate according to worker cooperative principles, very few ESOP companies currently qualify as worker cooperatives. The National Center for Employee Ownership has extensive resources on ESOPs available on their website, <http://www.nceo.org>.

- **What is the difference between a collective and a cooperative?**

A collective is a general term for groups where management decisions are made democratically, usually by some form of consensus. The term can apply to businesses, nonprofits, or volunteer groups, including worker cooperatives. Collectives are often organizations that do not have ownership buy-in or profit-sharing. Cooperative is a more formal term signifying that the entity is a member-benefit organization designed to meet community needs, with economic participation and democratic governance by members.

In addition to worker cooperatives, which are found in many industries and sectors across the economy, there are also sector-specific cooperative forms, such as housing cooperatives, agricultural producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and credit unions.

- **Why are cooperatives more common in other countries than in the U.S.?**

It is true that the cooperative economy is strong and in some cases better developed in other parts of the world, and that worker cooperatives have grown to be influential actors in the economies of Spain and Italy, in particular. However, cooperatives also have a long history here in the United States, from farmers coming together in agricultural cooperatives to the rural electricians wiring the countryside to the earliest worker cooperatives that emerged from artisans' guilds and labor unions. Cooperatives happen anywhere people come together to meet their needs – the cooperative form is international, flexible, and adapts to the conditions in which it emerges. We see concentrations of worker cooperatives in parts of the world where there is governmental and policy support for the cooperative form. There is great potential for cooperative development in general and worker cooperative development in particular to make cooperatives a larger part of the U.S. economy in the coming decades.

- **How do worker cooperatives fit into other social or economic movements?**

With their emphasis on people before profit, creating community, and equitable compensation and participation, worker cooperatives are a concrete example of using business as a force for social good. Additionally, a large percentage of existing cooperatives in the U.S. were specifically developed to meet the needs of people who lack access to business ownership or even sustainable work options. As a result, worker cooperatives can be defined as social enterprises and are often associated with larger movements, including the new economy movement (which is also referred to as the alternative economy, the fourth sector, or the social sector economy), the solidarity economy, as well as various causes from immigration rights to labor rights.

- **How can I start or join a worker cooperative?**

To find out more about existing co-ops, or to get resources on how to start a worker cooperative or convert an existing conventional business to a worker-owned or democratic workplace, contact the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, a national grassroots membership group of and for democratic workplaces, at [info@usworker.coop](mailto:info@usworker.coop).

## Sample articles and news stories featuring the Institute and the Federation

- Shaila Dewan. "Who Needs a Boss?" The New York Times, March 25, 2014, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/magazine/who-needs-a-boss.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/magazine/who-needs-a-boss.html?_r=0)
- Laura Flanders. "How America's Largest Worker Owned Co-Op Lifts People Out of Poverty" YES! Magazine, August 14, 2014, available at <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-end-of-poverty/how-america-s-largest-worker-owned-co-op-lifts-people-out-of-poverty>
- Ajowa fateyo. "A Co-op State of Mind: New York City jumpstarts worker cooperatives" In These Times, August 18, 2014, available at: [http://inthesetimes.com/article/17061/a\\_co\\_op\\_state\\_of\\_mind](http://inthesetimes.com/article/17061/a_co_op_state_of_mind)



**Democracy at Work  
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## About the Democracy at Work Institute

The Democracy at Work Institute was created by the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives to ensure that worker cooperative development in economically and socially marginalized communities is adequately supported, effective, and strategically directed. It is the only national organization dedicated to building the field of worker cooperative development. Through research, education and relationship-building, it meets the need for coordination of existing resources, development of standards and leaders, critical discussion of models and best practices, and advocacy for worker cooperatives as a community economic development strategy.

The Institute brings both a birds-eye view of the national stage and an experiential on-the-ground understanding of cooperative business, making sure that our growing worker cooperative movement is both rooted in worker cooperatives themselves and branches out to reach new communities of worker-owners.

Drawing on our ongoing research and on-the-ground-knowledge of worker cooperative enterprises, we work with a variety of clients and partners:

- With worker cooperatives to help them develop, grow and replicate.
- With non-profit organizations to support the implementation of new cooperative programs, and to increase the impacts of existing programs.
- With conventional businesses to support them in succession planning & transition to cooperative ownership.
- With governments and economic developers to design and implement policies and programs that use worker cooperatives as a tool for local economic development.

## About the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives

The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives is the national grassroots membership organization for worker cooperatives. Our membership also includes democratic workplaces, cooperative, developers and organizations that support worker cooperatives. In 2014, we celebrated our tenth anniversary, with over 100 member workplaces across the country who are building a dynamic movement for democratic worker-ownership.

Our mission is to create a thriving cooperative movement through the development of stable and empowering jobs and worker-ownership. We advance worker-owned, -managed, and -governed workplaces through cooperative education, advocacy and development.

As a membership and advocacy organization, we connect worker cooperative members to benefits, to each other and to the larger cooperative and economic justice movements. We amplify our members' individual voices to advocate for worker cooperatives at the local, state and national level. We provide consulting and technical assistance to cooperatives old and new. And through the education, training and organizing work of our Democracy at Work Institute, we expand the promise of cooperative business ownership to reach those who need it the most.

USFWC members can be found across the country and in diverse industries; they come in all different shapes and sizes. Our 100+ (and growing!) worker cooperative and democratic workplace members represent over 1600 individual worker-owners. Our Federation is led by a 100% member-elected board of directors, numerous member committees and working groups, and a three-person staff.