

RESOURCES FOR SOLIDARITY ECONOMY BUILDING

BECOMING OUR OWN BOSSSES



Becoming our own Bosses: Union Cooperatives as a Strategy for Building Worker Power

A worker-owned co-op is a business owned and controlled by its workers. Worker cooperatives are values-driven businesses that put worker and community benefit at the core of their purpose. In contrast to traditional companies, worker members at worker cooperatives participate in the profits, oversight, and often management of the enterprise using democratic practices.

Just some of the reasons that Co-op Cincy, a co-op developer, has identified for bringing unions and cooperatives together:

1. Helps co-ops scale with their values intact
2. Collective bargaining leads to clear expectations, clear human resource policies
3. Balance out the democratic work environment
4. Access to improved and affordable benefits
5. Direct connection to a movement of workers in the same industry pushing for working conditions industry-wide.
6. Connects the co-op to a platform for acting in solidarity with other workers.
7. Policy advocacy opportunities

Find resources below to learn more about union, worker-owned cooperatives as a strategy for building worker power. Pair these resources with [this six-part series on building community power](#), published by Nonprofit Quarterly with NEC in 2024.

The basics

- [Checklist for planning to start a union, worker-owned co-op](#) - Co-op Cincy
- [If the Workers Take a Notion: 'Works for All' Showcases Union Coops](#) - Labor Notes
- [Unions and Worker Co-ops: Why Economic Justice Requires Collaboration](#) - Nonprofit Quarterly
- [Union Co-op History](#) - union, worker-owned printer Worx
- [Why Unions & Worker Co-ops Should Ally](#) - Democracy@Work
- [Why Worker Co-ops Should Matter to Labor Unions](#) - U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives

Organizations & Movement Builders

U.S.

- [1worker1vote.org/](#) - NEC member organization dedicated to building a national network of unionized worker-owned cooperative businesses to overcome opportunity, mobility, and income inequality. Founders and others authored [Humanity @ Work & Life](#), 2023.
- [Coalition for Worker Ownership and Power](#) (COWOP), launched in 2019, is a growing Massachusetts network bringing together worker co-ops and developers, grassroots organizations and labor unions, funders and investors to resource and coordinate the advancement of a worker ownership movement across the state. COWOP works with its sister network [MASEN \(Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Network\)](#) and is supported by NEC member [Center for Economic Democracy](#).
- [Co-op Cincy](#) - Founded in 2011, NEC member Co-op Cincy is the first and most mature union co-op incubator in the US and now nurtures a resilient, interconnected network of several union and not-yet-union co-ops in greater Cincinnati with the goal of an economy that works for all.
- [Cooperative Economics Alliance of New York City](#), an NEC member, with unionized worker-co-op [Cooperative Home Care Associates](#) and [1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East](#) recently (2024) began [piloting a program](#) to grow CHCA's business and spread the values of cooperative economics. CEANYC and 1199 found that 2,734 of the union's members live in the largest housing cooperative in the US, [Co-op City](#) in the Bronx and will help Co-op residents access the quality and values-aligned homecare many of them need.

- [US Federation of Worker Co-ops Union Co-ops Council](#) - An all-volunteer, virtual organization supported by NEC member USFWC that has been operating since 2007. Participants include labor activists, worker cooperators, technical assistance and funding representatives, and academics. Associates meet monthly by conference call, share information about and resources with local projects, among other activities.
- Find a union co-op near you [here](#)

Canada

- [Union Cooperative Initiative](#) (UCI)
Founded in 2021, the UCI supports the creation, incubation, and operation of unionized cooperatives that provide family sustaining and flexible jobs that are good for people and the planet, that provide business opportunities for underserved communities, and are accountable to the communities we serve. Unions in British Columbia who are part of this venture include the Arts and Cultural Workers Union, Canadian Animation Guild, IATSE Local 891, LiUNA Local 1611, MoveUP and United Steelworkers District 3.
 - [What is the Union Cooperative Initiative?](#) - presentation to USFWC Union Co-op Council
 - [Arts & Cultural Workers Union, IATSE Local B-778 Formation](#) - ACWU presentation

United Kingdom

- [Union-coops:uk](#) - A campaign organization of worker co-op and labor movement working to create decent work through the creation of union worker co-ops.
- [Working together: Trade union and co-operative innovations for precarious workers](#) - published by Co-operatives UK, 2018
- [Union Co-op Efforts in UK](#) - session recorded at Co-op Cincy Union Co-op Symposium, 2021

Tools & Resources

- [A Union Toolkit for Cooperative Solutions](#) - strategies used by labor unions with case studies supporting the creation of worker cooperatives and other worker-owned businesses, 2021
 - Toolkit co-author Rebecca Lurie [presentation to USFWC Union Co-op Council, 2022](#)
- [Anti-Racist Facilitator's Guide To Co-op Development](#) - published by a multi-racial collaborative of co-op developers, educators, and labor organizers, 2023
- [Sustainable Jobs, Sustainable Communities: The Union Co-op Model](#) - foundational publication establishing union co-op model in US, 2012
- [USW Resolution: Workers' Capital, Industrial Democracy and Worker Ownership](#) - union resolution, 2011
- [Why Labor Unions Should Care About Worker Co-ops](#) - USFWC Union Co-op Council presentation, 2021

Events, Webinars, Videos, Podcasts

- [3 Complementary Paths to Worker Power- Wellspring's Labor Day Discussion & Panel](#) - Panel and discussion focusing on efforts in Western Massachusetts to build worker power via traditional union organizing, independent union organizing and worker cooperatives, 2022
- [Forming Union Co-ops](#)
CooperationWorks! Webinar, 2022
- [Union Co-ops and Networks](#)
Session recorded at Co-op Cincy Union Co-op Symposium on the basics of the union co-op model with tips for building and organizing a regional union co-op network and ecosystem, 2021
- [Cynthia Pinchback-Hines, PhD, discusses Racial Justice and Co-op Development](#)
Everything Co-op podcast, 2021

Articles

About Union, Worker-Owned Co-ops ...

- [Transforming the Gig Economy: How Unionized Cooperatives Can Create Wealth for All Workers](#), 2023
- [Building Solidarity: How a Worker Center and Construction Union are Partnering to Support an Immigrant Worker Co-op](#)
- [What Ohio's Co-op Evangelists Learned From Spain's Thriving Union Co-op Network](#), 2023
- [Innovator Profile: CLEAN Car Wash Worker Center](#), 2023
- [How worker cooperatives shift power to workers](#), 2022
- [Taking the Shop: An Interview with the Slow Bloom Coffee Cooperative](#), 2022
- [How Lobstermen Formed a Union Co-op to Claw Back Fair Prices](#), 2022
- [Chocolatier makes a sweet treat out of solidarity](#), 2022
- [When These Workers Unionized, Their Cafe Was Put Up for Sale—So They Bought It](#), 2021
- [What's a union co-operative?](#), 2021
- [Explosion of Interest in Worker Cooperatives Drives Economic Changes](#), 2019
- [Nurses Join Forces With Labor Union to Launch Healthcare Platform Cooperative](#), 2017
- [Unions and Worker Co-ops, Old Allies, Are Joining Forces Again](#), 2017
- [Solidarity, PA - Dissent Magazine](#), 2015
- [How America's Largest Worker Owned Co-Op Lifts People Out of Poverty](#), 2014
- [What If Uber Were a Unionized, Worker-Owned Co-Op? These Denver Cabbies Are Making It Happen](#), 2014
- [Black Co-ops Were A Method of Economic Survival](#), 2014
- [Can Co-ops Save Unions?](#), 2013

- [Anti-Capitalist Meet-up: A Shot Gun Marriage Between Worker-Owned Cooperatives and Trade Unions](#), 2012
- [The Role of Unions in Worker Co-op Development](#), 2011

In Academic Publications ...

- [Breaking New Ground: Social Movement Theory and the Cincinnati Union Co-ops](#), 2022
- [Re-Imagining Localism and Food Justice: Co-Op Cincy and the Union Cooperative Movement](#), 2021
- [Shifting power, Meeting the Moment: Worker Ownership As A Strategic Tool For The Labor Movement](#), 2021
- [Building a Cooperative Solidarity Commonwealth](#), 2020
- [Union Co-ops and the Revival of Labor Law](#), 2018
- [Stronger together? Building new worker co-ops with union support](#), 2017
- [Worker-Owned And Unionized Worker-Owned Cooperatives: Two Tools To Address Income Inequality](#), 2016

About Unionizing at Consumer Co-ops

A consumer co-op is a business owned by its customers, for the mutual benefit of its customers. The purpose of consumer cooperatives is to offer goods and services at the lowest cost to the customer-owners — in contrast to companies that serve the interests of stockholders.

- [REI workers march on co-op headquarters, bringing contract goals](#), 2024
- [REI fostered a progressive reputation. Then its workers began to unionize](#), 2023
- [UFCW Local 663 Workers Authorize ULP Strike at Seward Community Coop](#), 2023
- [Co-ops and Labor Unions Work Hand in Hand: USFWC Supports REI Workers' Right to Unionize - U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#), 2022
- [REI Calls Itself a Co-op. But That Doesn't Mean It's Worker-Friendly](#), 2022
- [Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union Workers Win Union Recognition](#), 2022

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The New Economy Coalition is a network of 200+ organizations building the solidarity economy in the U.S. and showing that another world is not only possible — it's already happening.

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