

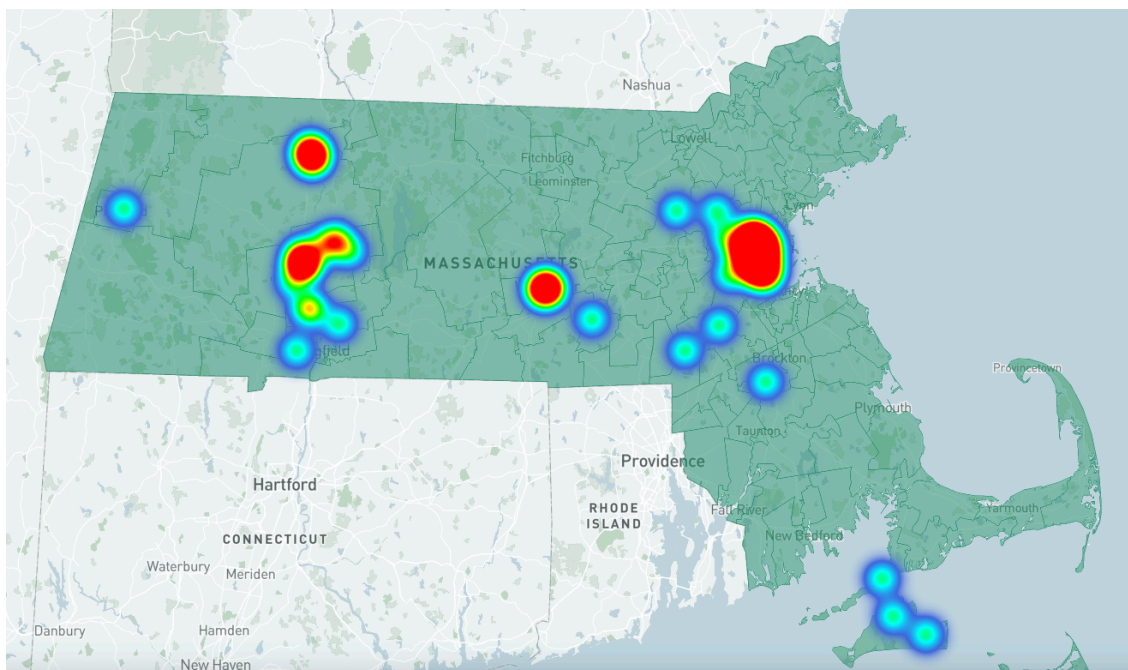
Mapping & Taking Inventory of Massachusetts Cooperative Ecosystems

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Overview

This report is intended as a guide to the Inventory of the [Cooperative Ecosystem in Massachusetts](#).

Both this guide and the inventory were prepared by students in Anthropology 341 Building Solidarity Economies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst during the Spring of 2022 in collaboration with the [Coalition of Worker Ownership and Power \(COWOP\)](#). As part of what we referred to as the “inventory pod”, the five co-authors of this report gathered and aggregated existing resources, and contacted organizations when additional information was desired or needed. The pre-existing resources that we drew on included those produced by the ICA Group and Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership, the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, the Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Network and Hendrix Berry, as well as the work of Jess Slattery who began a related compilation for COWOP in 2021.

We then added, compiled, and curated into publicly accessible spreadsheets.

The inventory and report are for you.

We intend this information to support conversations and build relationships in the cooperative movement in Massachusetts, as well as provide useful information for those interested in learning more about worker cooperatives in Massachusetts and beyond. The report itself is a snapshot of the cooperative ecosystem in Massachusetts; it engages one moment in time. The associated inventory, however, is a living, breathing document that will continue to grow as more cooperative businesses and organizations emerge, and as the information in the inventory is adjusted and made more complete. The *Appendix* includes a form for you to submit new information, alterations, and suggestions for the inventory, as well as contact information for general inquiries.

The report is divided up into sections that mirror the inventory categories:

Worker-owned Cooperatives

Other Cooperatively Run Enterprises

Funders and Capital

Development and Technical Assistance

Associations and Networks

Education, Media, and Resources.

These categories are permeable and many of the organizations listed belong in multiple categories. For example, the [TESA Collective \(Toolbox for Education and Social Action\)](#) provides development and technical assistance to worker-owned cooperatives, produces education and resources, and is itself a worker-owned cooperative. This report also centers and is largely delimited to worker-owned cooperatives in Massachusetts. This limitation is helpful in that it works to highlight the growing concentration of energies and efforts towards

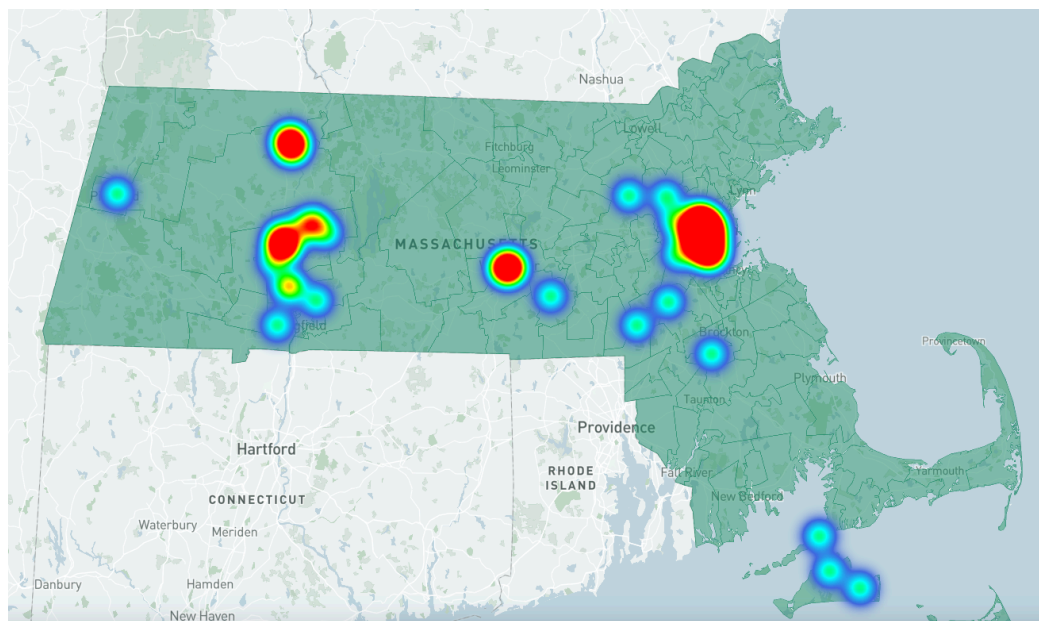
worker-owned cooperatives in the state. At the same time, it largely excludes other cooperative and ethical forms of business, households/homes, purchasing, finance, consumption, and so on. Our intention is that this work contributes to the many efforts and movements that are crossing and transgressing political boundaries to build cooperative, autonomous and enlivened communities that advance [solidarity economies](#) and put people and planet over profit.

Worker-Owned Cooperatives

Cooperatives have a deep, rich history in Massachusetts and in the U.S. writ-large including ties to [the labor movement](#), and as a strategy of both survival and liberation in BIPOC communities.¹ Worker-owned cooperatives are the least common form of co-operative, but the most powerfully transformative for workers.

In worker-owned cooperatives, workers are the owners of the enterprise and decide collectively how to make decisions about the business, and how to care for each other as work-owners. Worker-owners decide their own working conditions as well as what to do with profits. Instead of corporate greed, worker-owners can, and often do, prioritize individual and community well-being. Worker-cooperatives build wealth and create dignified work.

As of the writing of this report, there are over 65 worker-owned cooperatives (a few of which are in the process of becoming worker-cooperatives) in the state of Massachusetts, represented in over 20 industries. As shown in the map below, the highest concentrations are in and around Boston, Worcester, Springfield, and Amherst. At least 25 of these have launched within the last 10 years, and at least 20 in the last 5 years.



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¹ See Jessica Gordon Nembhard's 2014 [Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice](#) for a history of cooperatives in black communities and social movements in the United States.

Other Cooperatively Run and Democratic Workspaces

There are many initiatives that operate through democratic or collective decision making, but fall outside of the category of worker-owned cooperatives. These might be more or less formal and thus more or less visible. Many, many initiatives are not accounted for here. Some collectives operate as self-provisioning or unpaid labor in child-care collectives or community gardens. Other democratically run enterprises have some control over working conditions, but workers do not collectively own their businesses. For example, there are [seven cooperatively run student businesses](#) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Other enterprises are on their way towards incorporating as worker-owned through conversion strategies either into worker-cooperatives or ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans). For example, commercial kitchen and meal provider [City Fresh Foods](#) in Roxbury is progressing towards 100% worker-ownership as its ultimate goal. Though we are not cataloging ESOP's in this report, ESOP's offer another way for workers and communities to build wealth and power.

Funders and Capital

The largest material barrier for many worker-owned cooperatives is access to capital. Worker-owned cooperatives, just like any other enterprise, need investment to start and grow their business. Despite evidence to the contrary, cooperatives are often viewed as riskier investments than conventional businesses.

In Massachusetts, the cooperative ecosystem includes a growing number of funders dedicated to cooperative development. The [Cooperative Fund of the Northeast \(CFNE\)](#) is a longstanding lender to cooperative and socially responsible businesses, making targeted and flexible loans to worker cooperatives. Since its inception, no investor has lost any money.² The [Local Enterprise Assistance Fund \(LEAF\)](#) is also dedicated to cooperatives and socially responsible businesses, lending nationally but with many connections in Massachusetts, where it is located. Like CFNE, LEAF is [Community Development Financial Institution \(CDFI\)](#) making Massachusetts home to 2 out of 3 CDFI's that have a focus on cooperatives in the entire country.

For an increasing number of funders dedicated to advancing social justice, community control, and social well-being, supporting worker cooperatives and supporting communities that are organizing around worker cooperatives are central to their mission.

² As stated under the "What makes CFNE different from a bank" on this page <https://cooperativefund.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/>

Finally, organizations are mobilizing capital in creative ways, and enabling alternative and community based financing. The [Ujima Project](#), for example, has created a capital fund with different types and levels of investment. Ujima members from Boston's working-class BIPOC communities collectively control and make decisions around investment. [Common Good](#) converts money into an alternative currency to be spent and circulated at participating local enterprises, while pooling it into a community fund. It should also be noted that some cooperative developers, and worker cooperatives themselves, are employing Direct Public Offerings (DPO) to engage their communities directly, enabling community members to invest directly in the businesses.

Developers and Technical Assistance

Massachusetts's worker-cooperative ecosystem includes organizations providing multiple layers of support for worker-owned cooperatives. Founded in 1977, [ICA Group](#) has both a state and national focus, providing trainings and technical services to worker-owned businesses. The [Cooperative Development Institute \(CDI\)](#) was founded in 1994. CDI's programmatic areas include facilitating conversions to worker cooperatives and helping cooperatives find the resources and trainings needed at their particular stage of development.

Large, longstanding developers like ICA and CDI work parallel to and often collaboratively with other organizations who specialize in different types of technical assistance. The [TESA Collective](#) example, tailors programs and curricula for particular situations, as well as builds games and other creative educational tools. [COEverything](#) provides design services and consulting to emerging and existing community-based and cooperative projects.

Other organizations providing development and technical assistance are dedicated towards building worker cooperative networks in particular locations. The [Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives](#) support, promote and develop worker-cooperatives in the Connecticut River Valley in Western Massachusetts and Vermont. [Wellspring Cooperative](#) is creating a network of worker cooperatives extending from Springfield.

Finally, another level of development is taking place within initiatives and organizations that are seeing worker cooperatives as a part of their movement-based work. The [Pioneer Valley Workers Center](#) has launched [Riquezas del Campo](#), an immigrant led worker-cooperative farm in Hatfield. [Global Village Farms](#) in Grafton includes a cooperative farm as part of its education, training, and movement work towards indigenous sovereignty and relationship building.

Education and Resources

In addition to the growing number of organizations devoted towards developing and providing technical assistance for worker-owned cooperatives in Massachusetts, cooperative education—to member-owners, to potential worker cooperatives, and to the general public—takes place on multiple levels. This section of the report endeavors to highlight these efforts as they are occurring in Massachusetts, and the accompanying inventory gathers publicly accessible learnings and resources.

The educational activity growing Massachusetts's cooperative ecosystem embodies the 5th *Cooperative Principle, Education, Training, and Information* which states that “co-operatives provide education and trainings for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders—about the nature and benefits of co-operation.”³

Internal and public facing education takes place at conferences and gatherings that enable worker-owned cooperatives to share resources and learnings, as well as build relationships with each other and allied organizations and movements. For example, [COWOP](#) emerged from just such a gathering in 2018, along with its “sister” organization, the [Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Network](#).

Cooperative developers and movement leaders are increasingly offering [co-op academies](#) or [bootcamps](#), where individuals and groups in different stages of conceiving or organizing their business can learn-together about legal, business, governance, and political issues involved in worker-owned cooperatives. These multiple-session trainings also often critically explore capitalism and interrelated systems of oppression, discuss cooperative history and contemporary movements, and work to build relationships between cohort members.

Worker-owned cooperatives, organizers, and community leaders are producing their own resources for members and the general public—from cooperative primers, guides, and resource pages; to toolkits, games and media. And an increasing number of leaders and community members are engaging with and being featured in national media that advocate for social justice, cooperative economics, and sustainability. In addition to this guide, We encourage readers to visit the web-pages of “apex organizations” like the [US Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#), the [U.S. Solidarity Economy Network](#), and the [New Economy Coalition](#) to find valuable reports, links, and maps. The inventory has curated a provisional listing of resources and will continue to update and add.

All of this cooperative education from cooperatives and cooperative development organizations embodies the growing energy and investment in the cooperative movement. At the same time,

³ Taken from the International Cooperative Alliance and on the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives website.

it also speaks to the paucity of education about cooperatives in our schools, at the secondary and post-secondary levels.⁴

In Massachusetts, there is only one available college degree of any kind focused on worker-owned cooperatives, a [Certificate in Applied Economic Research on Cooperative Enterprises](#) in the Department of Economics at UMass Amherst that is in collaboration with the Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives and the Neighboring Food Association. In fact, UMass is a sort of hub of cooperative education that also includes [seven, cooperatively run student businesses](#) where students learn cooperative principles and build cooperative relations through practices. The student-run co-ops work with the Center for Student Business which “provides co-curricular training and education in financial management, cooperative administration, and organizational development.”

Beyond this, there are a sprinkling of courses at the university level here and there that include worker cooperatives as part of their curriculum in relation to economics, black history, labor history, social movements, and so on. There are a few courses that center or are dedicated to worker-owned cooperatives. And there are fewer still that connect students directly with initiatives in Massachusetts that are organizing around worker cooperative initiatives, values and policies.

Networks and Associations

The 6th *Cooperative Principle*, Cooperation Among Cooperatives⁵ states that “cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.”

Owing in large measure to this principle, lots of ongoing informal cooperation takes place among cooperatives that we are unable to fully capture here, but can be in part seen through the activity of cooperative initiatives described in other sections of this report. In addition, Massachusetts organizations and networks are forming to further strengthen cooperative relationships and build power. Worker cooperatives in Massachusetts are affiliated with each other, and other solidarity economy initiatives, at the community and municipal levels through development and organizing efforts. At the regional level, the [Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives](#) acts as developer and organizer for worker cooperative movements up and down the Connecticut River Valley. At the state level the [Coalition for Worker Ownership and Power](#) is bringing together and organizing a worker-cooperative ecosystem and part of the broader

⁴ It should be noted that there are numerous schools at the primary level in Massachusetts that are organized as collectives and cooperatives. And, the embodied experience of parents, teachers, administrators, and students participating in these schools surely has an important effect on how people envision being together in the world.

⁵ Taken from the International Cooperative Alliance and also on the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives website.

solidarity economy movement. Numerous worker cooperative organizations in Massachusetts are also tied into national organizations like the [U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#), the [New Economy Coalition](#), and the [U.S. Solidarity Economy Network](#). And, some of these nested entities are also tied into international movements, like [RIPESS](#) and the [International Cooperative Alliance](#).

These connections at different spatial and political levels are building and strengthening relationships, helping cooperatives to share resources, educating each other and the general public, and building power across and between communities that are assembling economies that put people and planet over profit.

Acknowledgements

The solidarity economies inventory pod would like to acknowledge the work of the organizations and individuals that have created previous listings and maps of worker-cooperatives and solidarity economy entities; these were the primary sources we used to initially gather together information for the inventory which we also complemented with internet searches, direct phone call and email inquiries, and the use of Open Corporates, a site listing companies including various worker cooperatives (<https://opencorporates.com/>). The pre-existing listings included those produced by the ICA Group and Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership, the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, the Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Network and Hendrix Berry, as well as the work of Jess Slattery who began a related compilation for COWOP in 2021.

Appendix

This document is a static snapshot of a movement in the making. The inventory, we hope, will contribute to this movement by both reflecting the current state of things, and opening possibilities. This inventory will be managed and kept open access by COWOP and BSE. We endeavor to track worker cooperative happenings, and regularly update and expand the inventory so we can have dynamic, open access resources for your conversations, cooperative development, organizing, and power building.

We need your help to keep this inventory as accurate and up-to-date as possible.

For any additions, corrections, suggestions, or other potential edits to the inventory, [please fill out this form](#).

For further conversation or questions, contact cooperativeinventoryma@gmail.com