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# Sharing Like We Mean It

Working Co-operatively in the  
Cultural and Tech Sectors

Report on a Survey of Co-operatives in  
the Creative Industries in Canada, the  
United Kingdom, and the United States

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# **Sharing Like We Mean It**

**Working Co-operatively in the  
Cultural and Tech Sectors**

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**"It's hard work but the right work  
for creating the future we want."**

**SASSAFRAS TECH COLLECTIVE**

**WHAT IS A CO-OPERATIVE?**

"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." <sup>1</sup>

**WHAT ARE 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." <sup>2</sup>

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**"Each of us individually has limited networks, but together we have a much larger network. So, we are all able to utilize our networks to broaden our reach without needing to rely on corporations for advertising."**

**SURVEY RESPONDENT, ARTISTS' CO-OP**

# Introduction

**Endless hustle.**

**Intense competition.**

**Precarious employment.**

**Racism and sexism.**

**Limited networks.**

**Privatized difficulties.**

**Extractivist investors.**

**Bullying bosses.**

**Working on projects at odds  
with your values.**

These are familiar issues for many people who work in the creative industries, or arts and culture, media and communication, and digital technology. The precarity of work in creative industries has been laid bare and exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as countless workers in these industries have been laid off, lost gigs, and slipped through the cracks of government income relief programs. *Sharing Like We Mean It* is for people who are frustrated by working conditions, employment prospects, and organizational culture in the creative industries – and beyond – and are curious about worker-centered alternatives. This report explores one alternative, **the co-operative model**.

A co-operative is an organization collectively owned and democratically governed by its members. A worker co-op, for example, is a business owned by the people who work in it, while a consumer co-op is owned by the people who purchase from it. Co-ops can be for-profit or not-for-profit, a small-scale operation or a vast enterprise. Co-ops are created to satisfy an unmet need among their members, whether it's a need for a sustainable livelihood or affordable rent. Conventional companies are driven to maximize profit. In contrast, the co-operative tradition is rooted in mutual aid, dignity, local economies, and service to community. In a co-op, big decisions are not made single-handedly by a boss, a venture capitalist, or the largest shareholder. As democratic organizations, co-ops uphold the principle of one member, one vote.

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This report sets out to show that the co-operative model is a real alternative to competitive and individualized patterns of work. Building on Dave Boyle and Kate Oakley's reflections on why co-operatives and creative industries are a good fit,<sup>3</sup> this report is based on research we carried out in 2019 and 2020 on co-ops in creative industries in Canada, the UK, and the US. We designed and distributed an online survey completed by 106 co-ops and interviewed 12 members of worker co-ops.<sup>4</sup>

Our research reveals a small but vibrant co-operative landscape in the cultural and tech sectors, from co-operatively run art galleries to co-op advertising agencies, web development companies, architecture firms, coworking spaces, ceramic studios, and film production rental services.

Our findings showcase the diversity of co-operative practice in the creative industries. Statistical data give an overview of the sector and co-op profiles illustrate what co-operative work can look like in practice. While this report will be of interest to established co-operators who want to learn more about how other co-ops operate, *Sharing Like We Mean It* is geared to cultural and tech workers who may be drawn to the co-operative idea but want to better understand its practicalities and potentials. But this report is not a how-to guide on starting a co-op. For anyone wanting to take concrete steps towards working co-operatively, we note some of many excellent resources available in the Co-op Support Systems section of this report.

We try to present a realistic picture of co-ops, including their promises and challenges, their strengths and tensions. Co-ops are not a magic solution to systemic work problems. Still, we believe that the co-op model, in conjunction with other pro-worker policies and organizations, holds potential to democratically remake work in ways that have yet to be fully realized or widely tested in creative industries. As our research participants told us, growing the co-operative economy requires, above all, increased public awareness of the co-op model. We hope this report helps to build that awareness.

Why?



# The co-operative principles<sup>5</sup>

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

## 1 VOLUNTARY AND OPEN MEMBERSHIP

Co-operatives are **voluntary** organizations, **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.

## 2 DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

Co-operatives are **democratic** organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. [Individuals] 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 organized in a democratic manner.

## 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.

## 4 AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

Co-operatives are **autonomous** self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, 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.

## 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.

## 6 CO-OPERATION AMONGST 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.

## 7 CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Co-operatives work for the sustainable **development of their communities** through policies approved by their members.

# Why work co-operatively?

Our respondents had different reasons for choosing the co-op option. Some of them arrived at the co-op model out of a frustration with work realities that are seen as inevitable occupational hazards of creative industries. One arts co-op, for example, says they opted for the co-op model in part to make a “political statement against poor working conditions and [the] culture of competition” in the cultural sector. Many respondents mentioned how co-op membership has made care and mutual support big parts of their work lives.

But people don’t get involved in co-ops just to improve their individual working conditions. Many want to be a part of – or help to create – a different kind of organization, one whose biggest priority is not “growth for its own sake,” as one co-op put it.

Respondents were also drawn to co-ops to have increased control over their careers. The co-op model, said an actors’ co-op, gives members “greater creative control over the work we choose to do.”

Co-op work, respondents tell us, is not like other jobs. “Working in a co-op,” according to a design co-op, “feels very different from working in a traditional workplace. Mostly, for us, the clearest advantage [is] the absence of management or shareholders. We run our organisation.” The open-concept office cosmetically flattens workplace hierarchy. More meaningfully altering power in the workplace is seen as a big plus of working co-operatively. “We are in charge of our own decisions and don’t have to answer to a boss,” says one tech co-op worker-owner. “The egalitarian and democratic nature of co-operatives,” says another co-op member, “make working at [a co-op] a far better experience than any other place I have worked at.”

Others like how working co-operatively can shift the kind of people they are at work. One worker-owner says: “I get to be myself all day long. I retain a say in all that I do with no boss to tell me I have to do something. In return, I give my co-workers the best effort I can muster that day and pledge to be approachable and respectful of others with differing opinions and skill levels.”

Some respondents highlighted a creativity dividend. As a worker-owner at tech co-op Openflows says: “I don’t want to be someone’s boss; the level of creativity when power is distributed increases. When people are in charge of their work lives, they can participate more fully at work and outside of work.”

A lot of people choose to work co-operatively to enact their values, which many co-operators see reflected in the co-op principles. As Star and Shadow Cinema, a self-organized cultural space, comments: “The ethical values of the co-operative model are important to us, and as a structure, it brings attention to our purpose as a space for the community to engage with democratically.” Or, as Oakland’s Design Action Collective distills it: “Being a co-operative allows us to model our social justice values in the way we work with one another.”

## REASONS FOR CO-OPERATION

Each of our survey respondents was asked to rank the main reasons for their co-op’s existence. In order of importance, they selected the following from options provided within the survey:

- 1 Support the well-being of members**
- 2 Generate economic value for members**
- 3 Make a positive impact on the world**
- 4 Promote an economic alternative**
- 5 Create meaningful work**
- 6 Provide stable jobs to members**
- 7 Serve an unmet need in local communities**

# VALU CO-OP: VANCOUVER ARTISTS LABOUR UNION

*Linking co-ops and unions*

Like many cultural workers, VALU CO-OP's Catherine de Montreuil had conversation after conversation with peers about working conditions in the arts – the precarity, the exploitation, the frustration. The co-op model, says de Montreuil, offered a "pragmatic approach to address these issues. It was like, there's something we can do about it. We don't just have to talk about it and bemoan our precarious positions."

VALU's start was about unions as much as co-ops. One of VALU's co-founders, artist Jonny Sopotiuik, works for a labour union. The thinking went something like this: trade unions buy campaign swag, from buttons to totes; artists have the skills to make this stuff; and if artists were to run a business that put ethical labour practices at the centre, then union clients (and like-minded organizations) would have a good reason to purchase from them. Sopotiuik had taken an undergrad course on co-ops and his union job involved working with co-op partners. Another co-founder, artist Emily Neufeld, was familiar with co-ops, too – her parents' business was part of a producer co-op.


Even so, a lot of research was required to envision VALU. With the help of an arts council grant, Sopotiuik researched different ways artists had organized in the past. Some of the co-founders attended a co-op development workshop, which solidified their commitment to a worker co-op model: they wanted a structure that would put democratic workplace values at the centre. And in keeping with their ties to the labour movement, VALU's founders wanted the co-op to be unionized. VALU was welcomed by the International Association of Theatrical

Stage Employees (IATSE), a 140,000-member entertainment union. VALU is an IATSE local, the Arts and Cultural Workers Union, IATSE Local B778.

VALU needed start-up financing to get equipment and space – and that required a business plan. Preparing the plan was a serious challenge because, like for many cultural workers, working for free was not an option. In this case, the arts grant provided the funding to allow them to develop a plan that clearly outlined their vision. VALU took out a loan and a line of credit with the credit union VanCity. Member shares were another funding source. With the exception of Indigenous members from Coast Salish territories, each member is required to purchase a flat-rate share. If they don't have the money up front, new members can earn their share by logging sweat equity hours. Based in a city famous for gentrification, VALU managed to secure space at a discount in a building owned by a Chinese benevolent society, the Lim Association. VALU's first orders were from its supporters, VanCity and IATSE. For co-ops, solidarity is a vital start-up resource.

Currently, VALU has about 20 members. Recruitment has involved a lot of one-on-one conversations with prospective members. While the membership has been built through personal networks, the co-op's policies limit each member to recommending one new member and require that a minimum of half of the members are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour. "If you don't do that right off the bat," says Neufeld, "you never get there, because you build a culture that is not friendly."

Intentionality, or taking care to shape the culture of the co-op, has been key to VALU's start-up phase. Part of this means foregrounding not only skills, but also fit, when considering applicants. Wary of overly informal organizational processes, VALU's co-founders set out to "create a structure that was democratic and embedded our values," which have been codified in their memorandum of association and policies. In terms of governance, VALU has a board of directors and holds monthly general assemblies. Members contribute to working groups, covering sales, communication, production, and other areas. VALU has instituted a flat-wage structure, is entering into agreements with other unions, and looks forward to hosting training workshops, discussions of art and labour, and social events in their space. As production started up, VALU confronted the challenges of adjusting to a democratic workplace. Worker-owners are unlearning the habit of asking for a manager's approval, for example. Describing "grace and kindness" as features of the workplace, VALU's instigators are holding strong to a union movement adage: "people get involved because of issues, but they stay because of relationships."

While VALU wants to contribute to wider efforts to improve labour conditions in the cultural sector, the co-op is a tool for its members to co-operate their way to better artistic livelihoods: worker-owners access decently paid work through VALU. The co-op is an infrastructure that materially supports members' individual art practices. "We've been really intentional in building the co-op," says Sopotiuik, "we're not there to serve the co-op, the co-op is there to serve us." 

Who?

# A snapshot of co-ops in creative industries

## CO-OP TYPES

Our survey respondents represented a range of co-op types:

- 41%** **WORKER CO-OPS** are businesses owned and controlled by their employees (though worker-owned co-ops can hire non-member labour).
- 11.4%** **MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CO-OPS** are member-owned and -governed organizations that combine two or more categories of members (or "member classes") with a mutual interest in the organization's activity.
- 10.5%** **PRODUCER CO-OPS** are organizations owned and governed by multiple entities in the same industry that pool resources to meet a common need (e.g., process a product, perform administrative and marketing services, access resources).
- 2.9%** **CONSUMER CO-OPS** are consumer-owned and -governed organizations that sell goods and services used by their consumer-members.
- 34.3%** **OTHER** (e.g., freelancer co-op, actor co-op, artist co-op). Freelancer co-ops, or employment co-ops, share some characteristics with worker co-ops and producer co-ops but are unique in bringing together self-employed workers, enabling them to access social protections typically only available to workers with employee status.

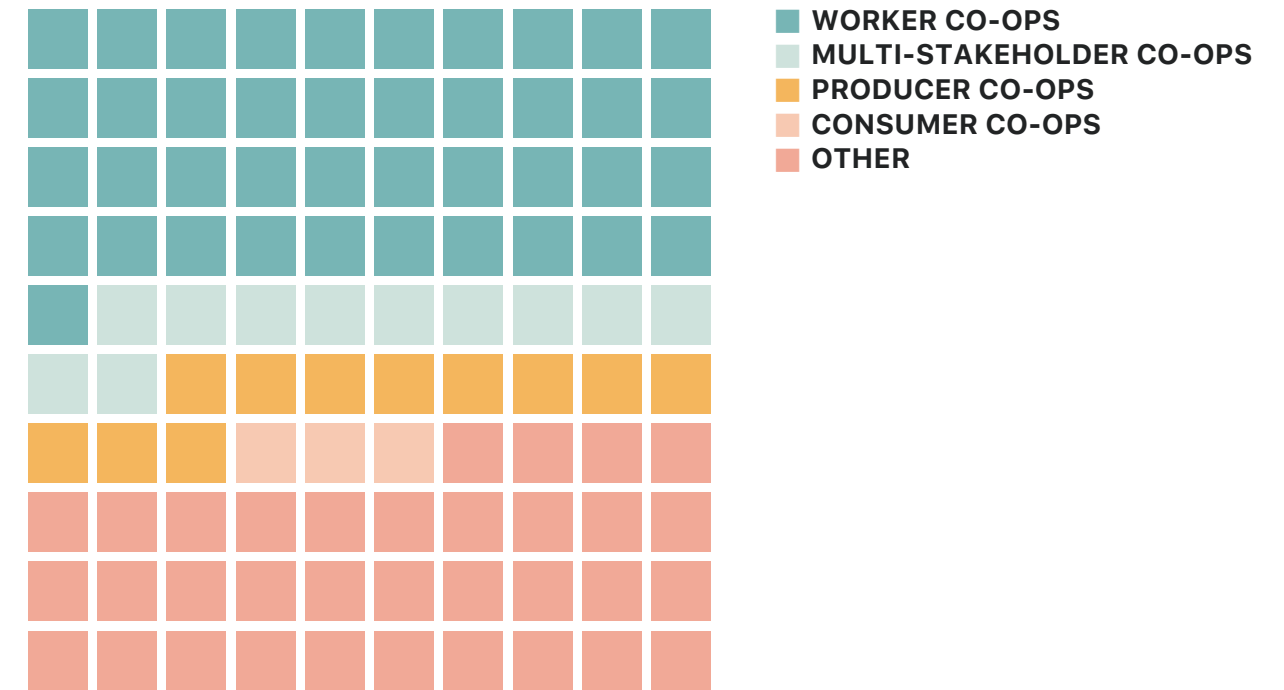
## CO-OP FIELDS

Co-ops in our study work in the following fields:

- 55.2%** **ARTS AND CULTURE**
- 19%** **TECHNOLOGY**
- 17.1%** **MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**
- 8.6%** **OTHER**

## SURVEY SAMPLE

### TYPE



### FIELD



# Examples of co-ops in the creative industries<sup>6</sup>

## ACRE Projects

Chicago, IL ■ artist-run non-profit 🏠 artists' residency and exhibitions

## Arise Architects

Guelph, ON ■ worker co-op 🏠 architecture

## Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative

Halifax, NS ■ member-run arts-centre 🏠 production equipment and studio support

## KO\_OP

Montreal, QC ■ worker co-op 🏠 digital games and interactive art

## Lower Town Lofts Artist Co-operative

Saint Paul, MN ■ housing co-op 🏠 live-work studios

## Means TV

Detroit, MI ■ worker co-op 🏠 film and news streaming

## Blake House Co-operative

London, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 film production

## Calverts

London, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 design and print production

## Chancery Co-operative Management

London, UK ■ actor co-op 🏠 professional actors' agency

## Meerkat Media

Brooklyn, NY ■ worker co-op 🏠 media production company

## New Internationalist

Oxford, UK ■ multi-stakeholder co-op 🏠 magazine and book publisher

## Openflows Community Technology Cooperative

New York, NY ■ worker co-op 🏠 open-source software solutions

## Ceramics Studio Co-op

London, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 ceramics and sculpture studios and classes

## Chapter Thirteen

Glasgow, UK ■ curatorial co-op 🏠 curatorial projects and exhibition space

## Collective Architecture

Glasgow and Edinburgh, UK ■ employee-owned trust 🏠 architecture and urban design

## Outlandish

London, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 digital agency

## Paper Rhino

Peterborough, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 art, design, illustration, video

## Sassafras Tech Collective

Ann Arbor, MI ■ worker co-op 🏠 web design and development

## Star and Shadow Cinema

Newcastle upon Tyne, UK ■ volunteer-run open co-op 🏠 film, music, events

## Stitched Up

Manchester, UK ■ non-profit co-op 🏠 sustainable fashion

## Stocksy United

Victoria, BC ■ artist-owned co-op 🏠 stock photo and video agency

## Coopérative Belvédère

Montreal, QC ■ solidarity co-op 🏠 marketing communications

## Design Action Collective

Oakland, CA ■ worker co-op 🏠 graphic design

## ECTO

Montreal, QC ■ solidarity co-op 🏠 coworking space

## Story 2 Designs

Seattle, WA ■ worker co-op 🏠 digital communication design

## VALU CO-OP

Vancouver, BC ■ worker co-op 🏠 social action production studio

## Vulk

Austin, TX ■ worker co-op 🏠 software development

## Hypha

Toronto, ON ■ worker co-op 🏠 technology design and development

## Indycube

Cardiff, UK ■ community benefit society 🏠 coworking and professional services

## Justseeds Artists' Cooperative

Pittsburgh, PA ■ worker co-op 🏠 graphics, prints, publications

## Kinngait Co-operative

Cape Dorset, Nunavut ■ artist co-op 🏠 art studio, distribution, sales

## Wood Shop

Vancouver, BC ■ worker co-op 🏠 furniture design and manufacture

## Zed Books

London, UK ■ worker co-op 🏠 publishing

# Co-op support systems

## FINANCIAL START-UP SUPPORT

The co-ops in our survey identified their sources of financial support during their first couple of years in operation.

### MOST COMMON SOURCES:

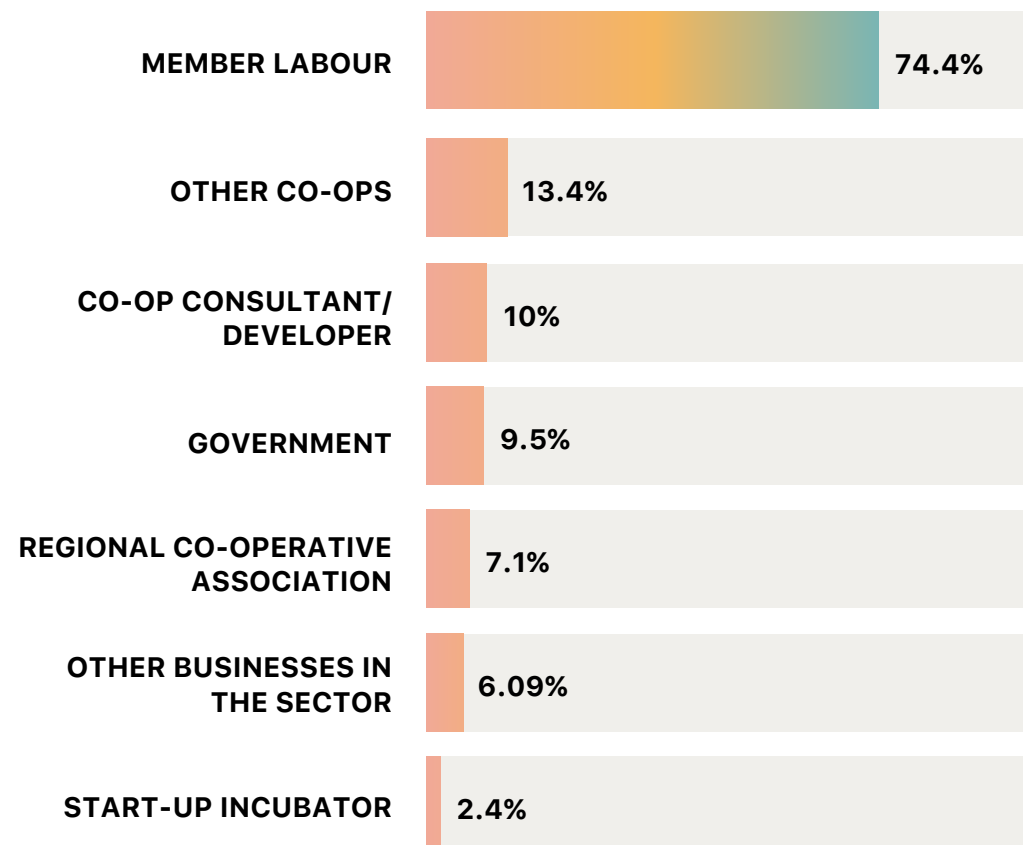
- 🚩 REVENUE/RETAINED EARNINGS
- 🚩 ONLINE FUNDRAISING
- 🚩 LOAN FROM MEMBERS AND MEMBER SHARES
- 🚩 FOUNDATION GRANTS

### LEAST COMMON SOURCES:

- 🚩 VENTURE CAPITAL
- 🚩 GOVERNMENT GRANTS
- 🚩 CREDIT UNION LOAN
- 🚩 CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION GRANT
- 🚩 BANK LOAN

## NON-FINANCIAL START-UP SUPPORT

While access to formal financial support is vital, co-ops surveyed also relied on an array of non-financial supports in their early stages. They rated the following sources of non-financial support in terms of how much support each one offered, with the percentages representing the frequency with which the source was identified as very important. Notably, member labour was rated as the primary source of non-financial support.



## SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Mutual aid is a pillar of co-operation. In keeping with the co-op principle of co-operation among co-operatives, the majority of the co-ops (67%) surveyed reported that they co-operate with other co-ops. They bank with credit unions, share resources, procure services from each other, and participate in events together, for example.

Only a small percentage of the co-ops identified "other co-ops" as an important source of support during their development stage. New co-ops should, however, reach out to existing co-ops – and to co-operative associations. Co-op associations are member organizations that form a vital part of the co-op economy's social infrastructure: they promote the co-op model, provide services to new and established co-ops, and lobby for co-op-friendly policies. Most of the co-ops (71.4%) that responded were members of a co-op association.

Each co-op association has different capacities. According to surveyed co-ops, some of the most helpful association services include: governance support, networking opportunities, policy work, training and development, co-op legislation updates, and legal advice. As Design Action Collective commented, "it is so important to have support from others who understand what it means to be a co-op and the challenges that come up when interfacing with government and legal systems that do not understand worker ownership."

To people who are unfamiliar with it, the co-op model may initially seem less approachable or a less obvious choice than a conventional business or non-profit structure. Our respondents agreed that promoting the formation of new co-ops requires, above all, educating the public about co-ops and introducing the co-op model in college and university courses. Doing so is key to any long-game strategy to challenge sole proprietorship's status as the default option.

Gaps in the public's understanding of co-ops makes access to support all the more essential during the development stage. When we asked co-ops about start-up sources of support, co-operative developers did not rank highly. Perhaps this is because new co-operators were unaware that such specialists exist. Or perhaps this is because co-op development is insufficiently resourced within the co-operative movement. Whatever the case, co-op associations typically provide co-operative development assistance on everything from choosing an appropriate organizational structure to incorporating the organization, or they can refer emerging co-ops to consultants and lawyers who specialize in co-op development. Co-ops can also tap into publicly funded business development programs and put pressure on them to provide professional support specific to the co-op sector.

### EXAMPLES OF CO-OP ASSOCIATIONS

- 🚩 INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE
- 🚩 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION OF INDUSTRIAL AND SERVICE CO-OPERATIVES (CICOPA)
- 🚩 CO-OPERATIVES UK
- 🚩 CO-OPERATIVES AND MUTUALS CANADA

- | INTERNATIONAL | NATIONAL  | REGIONAL |
|---------------|---|----------|
|               | 🚩 CANADIAN WORKER CO-OP FEDERATION                |          |
|               | 🚩 NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (US) |          |
|               | 🚩 ONTARIO CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION                |          |
|               | 🚩 COOPÉRATIVE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT RÉGIONAL DU QUÉBEC |          |

# Resources

## FROM CANADA, THE UK, AND THE US

**The Resource Library**, hosted by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, "is a place where you can learn and share knowledge about co-ops, platform co-ops, the digital economy, and more." [resources.platform.coop](https://resources.platform.coop)

A project of Co-operatives First, an organization that promotes and supports co-op business development, the **Co-op Creator** provides a variety of tools and resources to assist with starting a co-op. [coopcreator.ca](https://coopcreator.ca)

Published by the British Columbia Co-operative Association, **Cultivating Co-ops** is a practical guide to the co-op development process. [bccca.coop](https://bccca.coop)

**Radical Routes** "is a network of radical co-ops whose members are committed to working for positive social change." [radicalroutes.org.uk](https://radicalroutes.org.uk)

**CoTech** is a UK-based "network of co-operatives" in tech services. "The members of the network aim to use their collective experience, skills, resources and knowledge to radically increase the market share of companies that are owned and run by their workers." [coops.tech](https://coops.tech)

**Co-op Clinic**, a project of the US Federation of Worker Co-operatives, offers "a network of peer advisors, all with strong social and professional ties, who provide technical assistance services to worker co-operatives," including "specialized assistance in setting up financial, governance, operations, and decision-making structures, as well as training in democratic management." [usworker.coop/programs/coopclinic](https://usworker.coop/programs/coopclinic)

Based in Quebec, **Consortium de ressources et d'expertises cooperatives** is a solidarity co-operative providing a range of professional services to support co-operatives. [leconsortium.coop](https://leconsortium.coop)

**London Co-op Development** "is a consortium of independent co-op business advisers. It provides a single point of contact for co-ops in London needing professional advice and support." [ldn.coop](https://ldn.coop)

**Co-opZone Developers' Network** is "a network of people and organizations dedicated to providing professional assistance to co-op entrepreneurs who are considering starting a new co-op or expanding an existing co-op." [coopzone.coop](https://coopzone.coop)

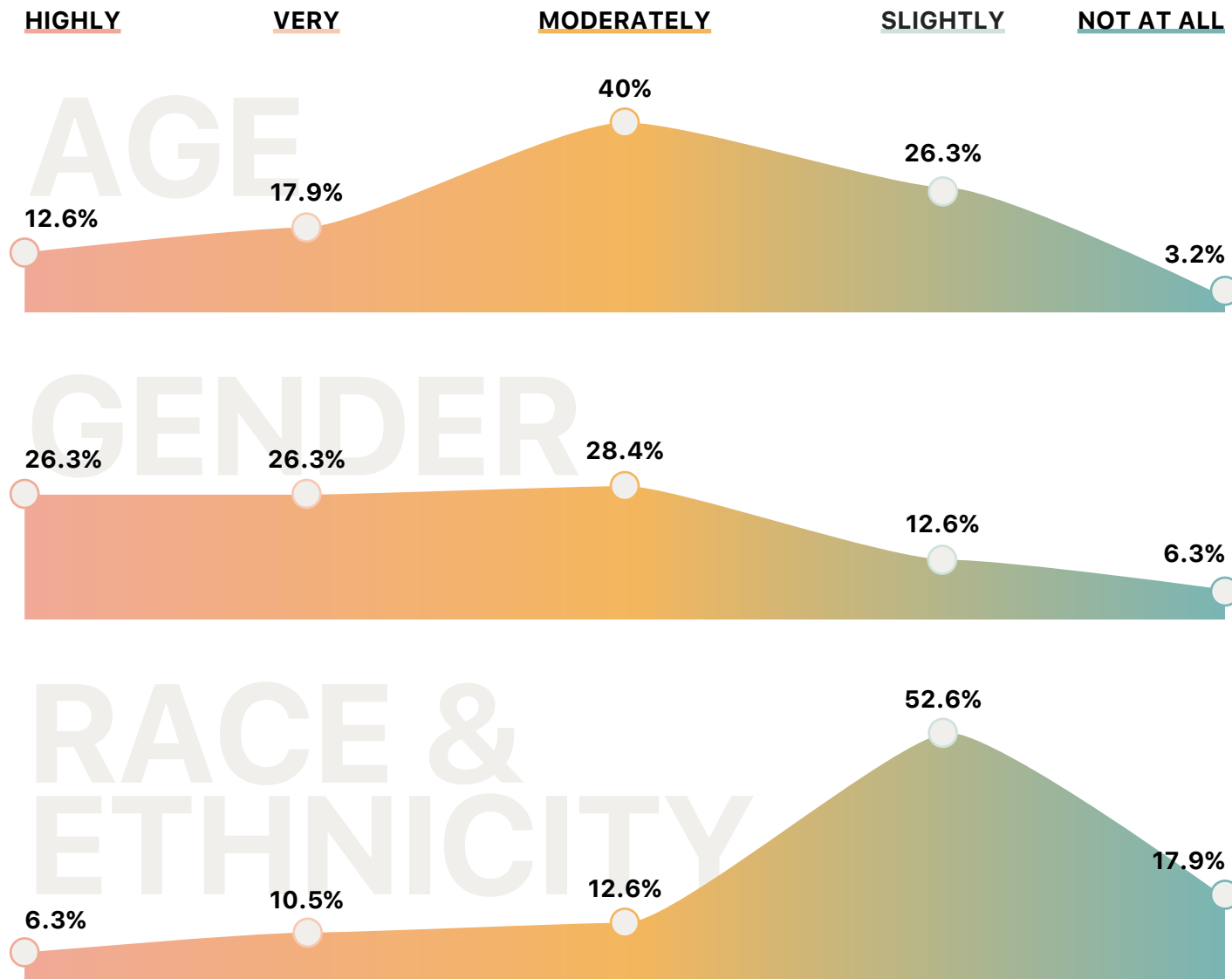
A worker co-op, **Stir to Action** publishes a magazine under the same name about co-op sector issues and hosts workshops on the co-operative economy and co-operative practice. [stirtoaction.com](https://stirtoaction.com)



# Equity and diversity

Co-ops were asked to characterize the diversity of their membership. The results suggest co-ops in creative industries are not immune from the social inequities that are known to be prevalent in cultural and tech work. The co-ops described themselves as most diverse with respect to gender and age, and least diverse with respect to race.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, co-ops in the creative industries must do more to be accessible to, and retain, racialized members. But our findings also reveal an important practical insight: member diversity is positively correlated with discussion of the co-operative principles. So, the more your co-op engages the co-operative principles, the more likely it is that your co-op will be representative and inclusive.



**“We started [our co-op] so we could provide affordable, fair services to ethically-conscious organizations, small companies, NGOs, and charities. Being a co-op empowers and nurtures all of our members, improving their work-life balance, allowing them control over the means of their production and a vested interest in the future of the organization.”**

SURVEY RESPONDENT, COMMUNICATIONS CO-OP

# STORY 2 DESIGNS

*No bosses,  
many leaders*

If starting a co-op seems daunting, keep in mind it's "just as hard as starting any other kind of business," says Jordan Green, one of five worker-owners of Story 2 Designs. Based in Seattle, Story 2 is a people-of-colour-led digital co-op providing design services, from branding to website development.

Story 2 was started about five years ago by four co-founding members. Some, says Green, were "fresh out of school and figuring out how to work a job that wouldn't kill their souls." Others were looking to escape poor work conditions they had experienced in non-profits. The co-founders, all of whom had previous exposure to the co-op model, were committed from the outset to making Story 2 a worker co-op.

"We started this co-operative as a way for us as marginalized people to begin building equity between ourselves," writes Story 2 Designs. Even if we live in a political democracy, says Green, a UX designer, "we spend most of our lives not working in a democracy." Co-ops can be a tool to democratize work. For Story 2, this means making a workplace where "there are no bosses."

By "culture of no bosses," explains Green, "we're really saying we respect your autonomy as a human being, and we see you as a human first." Fittingly, Green, who initially consulted for Story 2 prior to becoming a full-time member, was drawn to the co-op by the people involved rather than by the structure per se. "I bring my whole self to the organization," says Green about their expectations of employment.

Story 2's client list reflects the co-op's desire to align principles, operations, and capacities. The co-op's name, Story 2, is a response to "Story 1," or what Green describes as "the dominant paradigm that is failing us right now." Increasingly, Story 2 works with Black-led and woman-led social-good organizations. "We want to be agents of transformation," says Green. "We don't necessarily need to be on the frontlines. We can help people who are doing good work look and tell their story the best."

At Story 2, working co-operatively means each worker-owner has a say in the projects that are taken on. In a traditional design agency, says Green, your manager or director might "slam something on your desk: 'You're working on this account now.'" Story 2's worker-owners decide as a group whether to work with a prospective client, and each member provides input on a proposal before it is sent to a client. "So, when we commit to work, it is all of us committing to a job."

Green's experience at Story 2 has convinced them of the co-op model's special relevance to racialized workers in the US tech sector. "People of colour, particularly Black folks, who at a certain point get pushed out of their organization, feel like they have two options: to go to another organization and experience more forms of anti-Black racism, or they go as a solo practitioner and work as a consultant." Story 2 shows that forming a worker co-op is a viable alternative, says Green.

As Story 2 is each member's primary employment, the co-op has to bring in enough revenue to meet worker-owners' definition of a sustainable livelihood. Story 2 demonstrates that it's possible to do this while simultaneously disrupting what Green calls the "monoculture of exploitative capitalism." The co-op, as Green describes it, is an experiment in "how to act as leaders that are on an equal footing with each other." Underpinning this is the principle that each member "owns their own labour," while "the co-operative is all of us coming together, trying to flourish."

Members make bigger decisions collectively, attend a weekly group meeting, and communicate regularly through Slack to manage workflow. Day to day, each worker-owner has their own set of responsibilities. "We have to trust each other that we're going to get the work done," says Green. Ultimately, they say, "We're in service to each other. The co-operative is in service to its members, and in a leadership position, I'm in service to the co-operative."

Running a design business as a democratic workplace, admits Green, comes with challenges, including navigating a regulatory environment in the US that has not been set up with co-ops in mind. Despite these challenges, worker co-ops like Story 2 Designs show, as Green puts it, "if we want to change the way that we relate to each other, we should change the way in which we relate to our work." 🌱

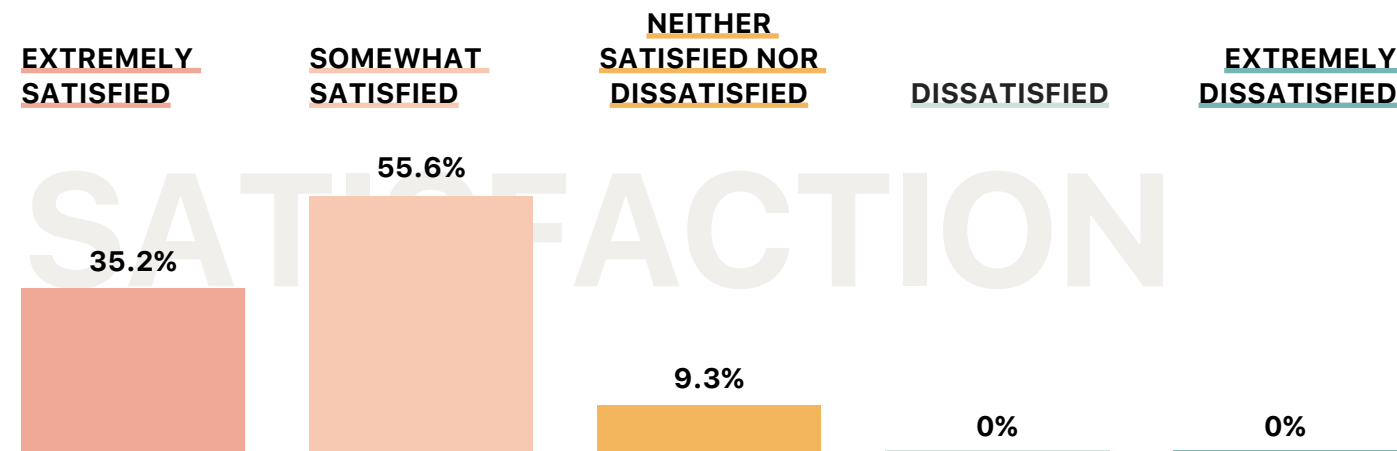
howw?

# How co-operators feel about their work

Co-op values might line up with an individual worker's personal values. But practically, are co-ops decent workplaces? Do they provide sustainable livelihoods? Do they offer meaningful work? Our survey results do not thoroughly answer these questions – but they give us a good impression.

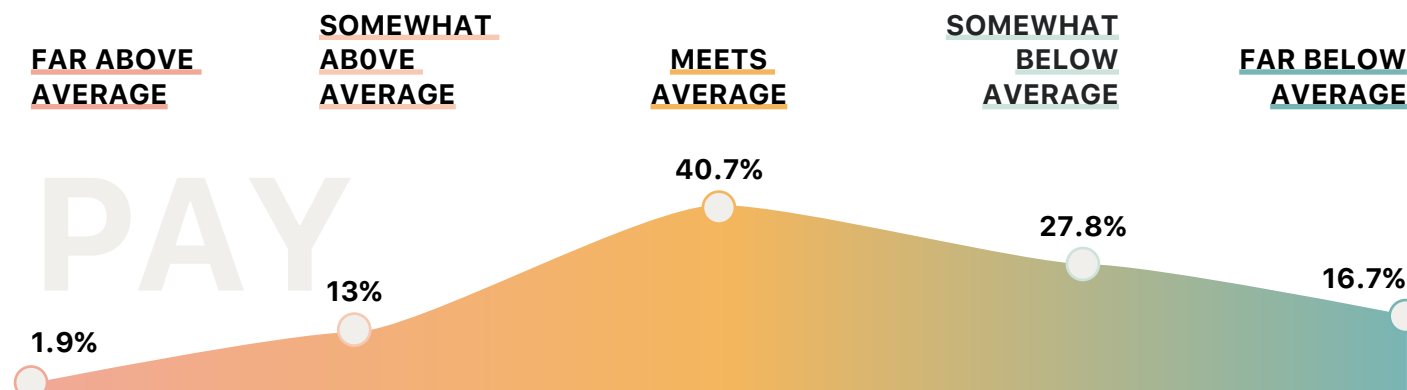
## SATISFACTION

We asked co-operators how they feel about their general working conditions. On the whole, the co-ops in our study appear to provide satisfying work environments, with more than 90% reporting that they are satisfied with their working conditions.



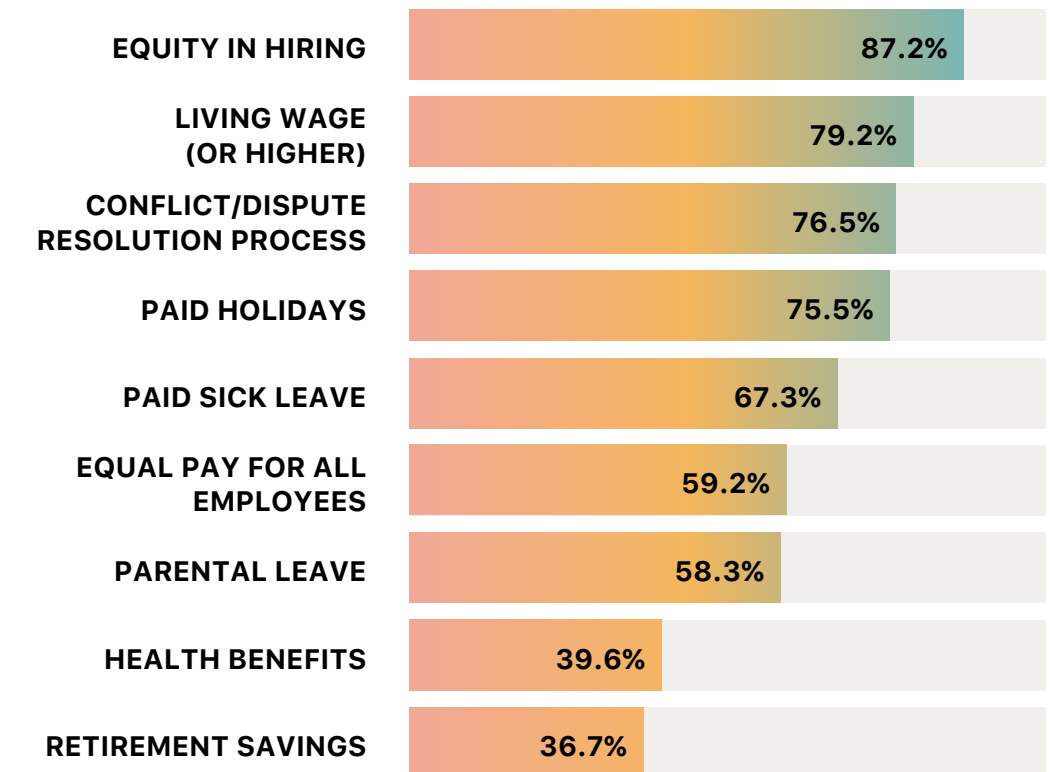
## MONEY MATTERS

Pay level is one indicator of whether a co-op provides a sustainable livelihood and fair compensation. More than half of the co-ops reported their pay rates meet or exceed average pay rates for their industry.



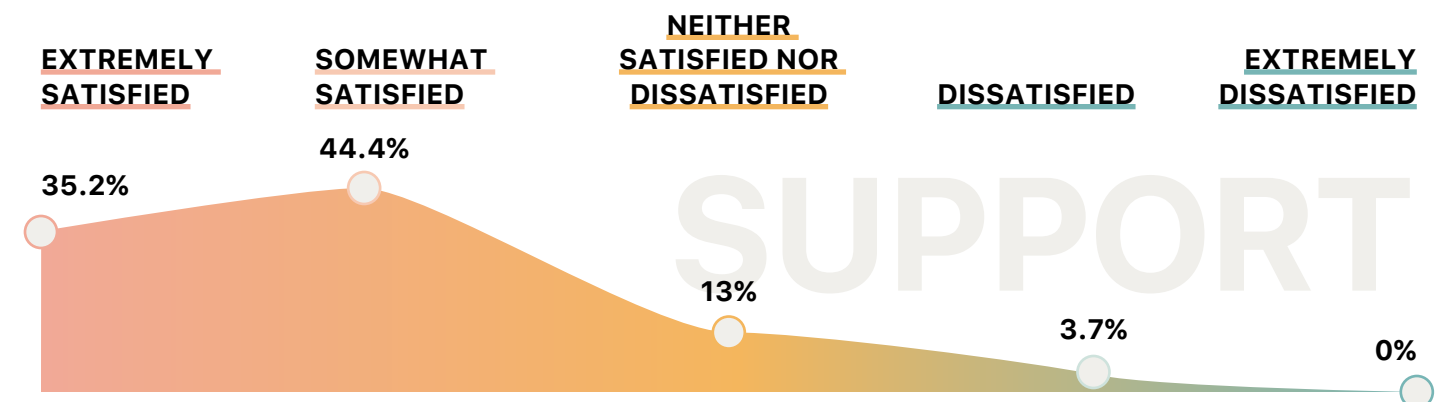
## WORKPLACE POLICIES AND BENEFITS

Percentage of co-ops with the following workplace policies and employment benefits:<sup>8</sup>



## SUPPORT

On the benefits of co-operative work, a majority of respondents reported being especially satisfied with the level of support they receive at work:



## HOW CO-OPERATORS FEEL ABOUT THEIR WORK

### VOICE

Having a voice is essential to workplace democracy. More than 90% of the co-ops surveyed agreed that democratic decision-making is a priority in their co-op and 86% agreed they aim to reach consensus when making decisions.

### BENEFITS OF CO-OPERATIVE WORK

Beyond having a say, the benefits of co-op work are varied. From the options in our survey, these were the five most-selected benefits of working at a co-op:

- 📌 SUPPORTIVE WORK RELATIONSHIPS
- 📌 A FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT
- 📌 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION
- 📌 A WORK CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGES TEAMWORK AND CO-OPERATION
- 📌 LOW HIERARCHY AT WORK

For the majority of co-ops, working hours tend to be flexible. 52.7% of the co-ops strongly agreed that their work schedule is flexible, and 45.5% strongly agreed that they are free to leave early.

### OVER TIME

Our survey findings suggest that most co-ops are largely satisfied with their work conditions. But there are also signs that a co-op's work culture can ossify over time: the longer a co-op has been in operation, the less likely it was that members strongly perceived benefits to working in a co-op.

### UNION CO-OPS

The relationship between the co-op sector and the labour movement has been strengthened in recent years. Bringing together co-operative values and collective representation, a small but not insignificant percentage of the co-ops in our study were unionized co-ops:

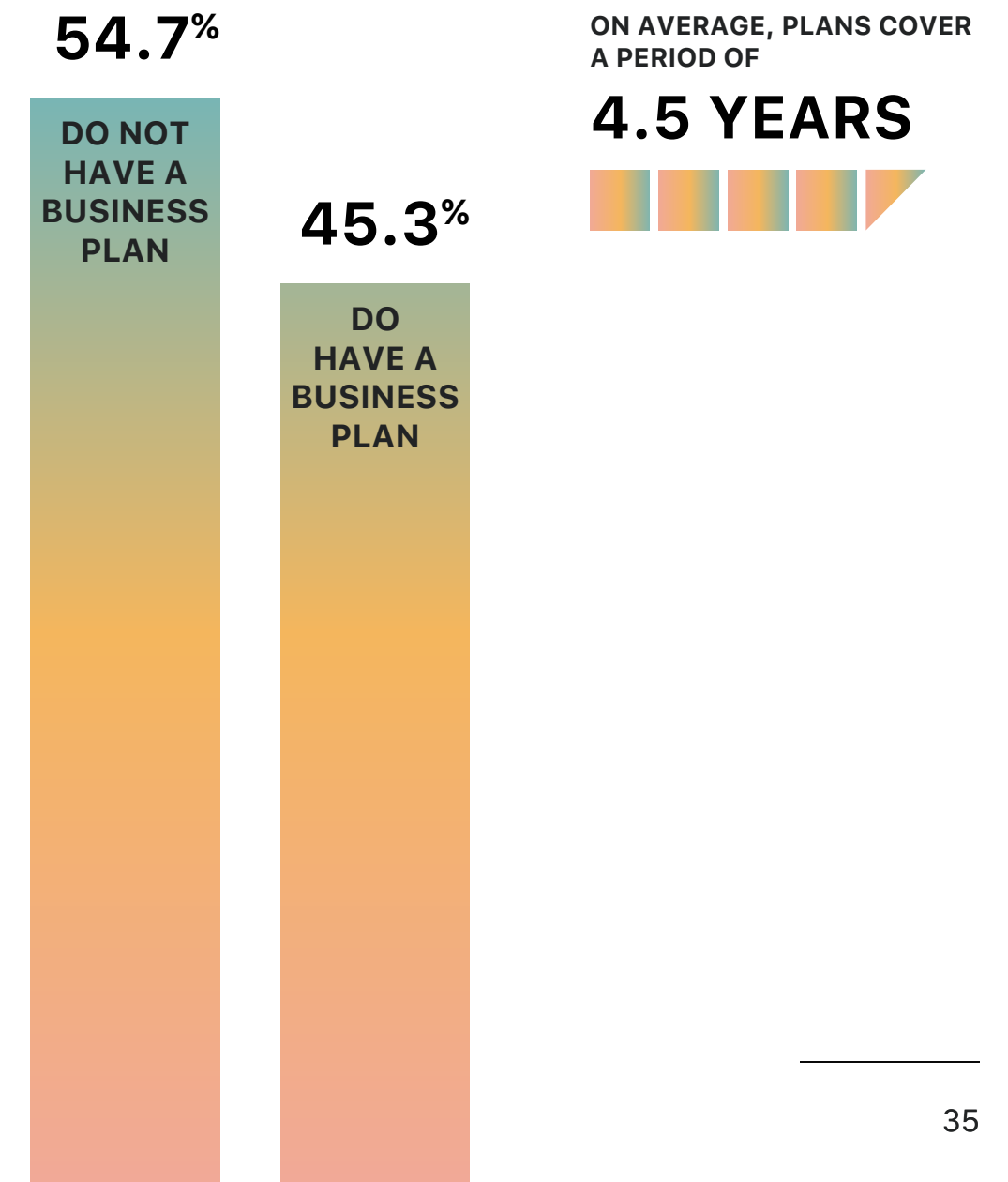
**20%** unionized    **80%** non-unionized



## Do you have a plan?

Because they cover topics as broad as market analysis, revenue-generation strategy, marketing plan, financial projections, and governance structure, formal business plan preparation often seems daunting – which perhaps explains why the majority of co-ops in our survey did not have one.

A business plan is highly beneficial to all businesses, including co-ops. This is especially true during the start-up phase. It enables members to clarify the co-op's purpose, to carefully reflect on its feasibility, to create a comprehensive information resource about the organization, and to satisfy a standard requirement when applying for financing.



# ARISE ARCHITECTS

## *Converting a sole proprietorship into a co-op*

David McAuley owned a small architecture firm and was a few years away from retirement. His 40-year-old namesake, J. David McAuley Architect Inc., would quietly close if he failed to find a next-generation buyer, and his employees would be looking for work elsewhere. It's a predicament that will face countless employees of small businesses headed by retirement-age baby boomers. But JDM was saved – or, more accurately, transformed. The emergence of Arise Architects Co-operative, a fledgling four-member worker co-op in Guelph, Canada, reveals business succession is a unique opening to create new co-operatives.

In 2017, McAuley attended a local event about succession planning put on by a city business development program, Innovation Guelph. A speaker from the Ontario Co-operative Association presented the co-op conversion option, where employees purchase their employer's business and reconfigure it as a worker-owned co-op. The concept was entirely new to McAuley, who floated it with his employees. One architect, Yvonne Ip, had first-hand familiarity with several consumer co-ops, but no experience with worker co-ops. Another employee, architect Danielle Gignac, says that while the co-op model had resonated for her, she "had never considered a co-op as a working model for architecture." But their boss' proposal "pushed a button."


JDM employees saw a solid "business case" for a worker buyout: they'd inherit a client history and a project record. But it was the prospect of shared ownership that made purchasing the business seem more approachable. Sole proprietorship "felt a little daunting," says Gignac. "Equal partnership was much more appealing [...] If anything was going to work,"

she says, "it would have to be this route." As Ip observes, the work process in many contemporary architecture offices is deeply collaborative – but "profit-sharing is still the same old, same old," whether the studio is set up as a partnership or sole proprietorship. Arise opted for a simple co-ownership structure: one member, one share.

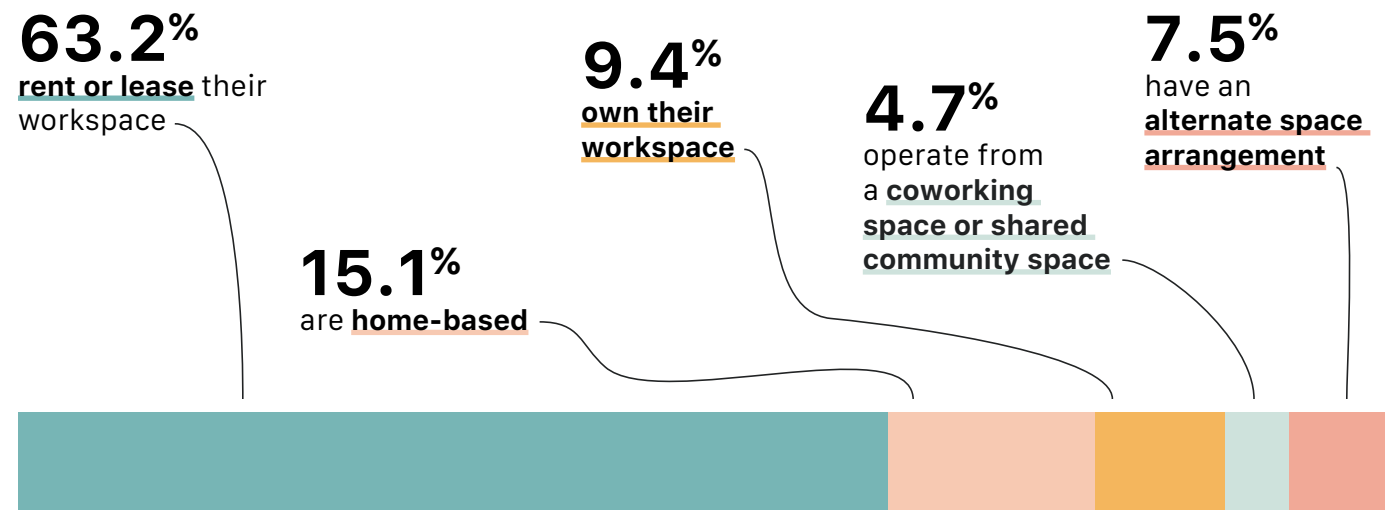
Arise officially launched in late 2019. The three-year transition process involved plenty of moving parts, and support came from a variety of sources. The founders received a start-up grant from a city business development program. In addition to the support of a business advisor through that program, they contracted a co-operative developer with insight on forming co-op businesses. They had to not only coordinate the purchase of JDM but also form a new business under the Co-operative Corporations Act, assisted by a lawyer with expertise in co-ops. They liaised with the Ontario Association of Architects to ensure Arise met professional certification requirements. A worker co-op construction company also provided valuable support by, for example, sharing its bylaws and articles of incorporation.

Some Arise members saw more than a strategy to sustain an enterprise and spread economic rewards and risk in the co-op model: co-op values aligned with their sensibility as architects that "it's not just about making money, it's about caring for our communities," as Gignac puts it. They also see in co-operative ideals a resource that could help shift them to how they'd prefer to work, whether it's deepening collaborative creativity, reducing organizational hierarchy, or democratizing decision-making. Still in their early days as a co-op, they have much to figure out about what

it means to "work as architects, as creative people, in a co-op setting," says Ip. And they recognize a unique challenge in a conversion: unlearning work habits and remaking work structures baked into the very history of their workplace. The most immediate change is on "the business side of things," says Ip. "The financials are transparent. Now, we're all knowledgeable about what the finances look like. We're responsible and know what kind of actions we need to take."

Barely a few months old when we spoke, Arise has valuable advice for prospective co-operators considering conversion who are brought together "more by fate than intention." Be realistic about the time necessary to develop the new business: "Don't do it at your busiest time." Prepare a conversion schedule, taking time out to celebrate milestones when you reach them. Talk, deeply, with other co-ops in your sector. Maintain open communication between members: "be willing to listen to one another and to really hear each other." Develop your vision, or "what we are saying about ourselves," early, and accept that differing visions among creative workers is inevitable. Finally, they suggest co-op convertors take a "trial run" at working co-operatively prior to formally making the switch, recognizing that it's not entirely realistic to expect a new co-op, arising out of the shell of a traditional business, to start behaving like a co-op instantly. As the transition from employee to worker-owner is a significant shift, consider adopting a stepped conversion process, making gradual operational transitions toward a co-operative model. "It would've been helpful," says Ip, "to try to go through the motions before the official setting up of the co-op." 

# Do you need space?



Co-ops rated affordable office space as one of their biggest challenges. That won't come as a surprise to anyone living in the costly cities or gentrifying districts where creative industries are clustered.

But what might a co-op response to prohibitively expensive workspace look like? One response is coworking co-ops. Most coworking spaces are conventional private businesses, but co-op alternatives exist. Self-employed workers and micro-enterprises have joined coworking co-ops, where members share the cost of rent, escape the isolation of working from home, expand their networks, and participate in the running of the space. Examples range from ECTO, a solidarity co-op in Montreal, to IndyCube, which operates a network of coworking spaces in the UK and offers self-employed members access to business support services, including invoice factoring and legal advice.

Another co-operative response to the affordable workspace problem was proposed by one of our survey participants, the California-based communication co-op Design Action Collective:

"Oakland, CA is a very expensive place to live and work. We need investment in housing and commercial real estate so our co-ops can thrive together. I would like to see associations facilitate the collective purchasing of property so we can secure shared spaces that we build and maintain together."

It's an inspiring suggestion. Imagine: co-operatively owned buildings, democratically governed by their resident-members, inhabited by co-ops or like-minded organizations, financed by credit unions, and a gateway to co-op support services. It's a solidarity economy strategy that deserves to be high on the co-op movement's agenda.

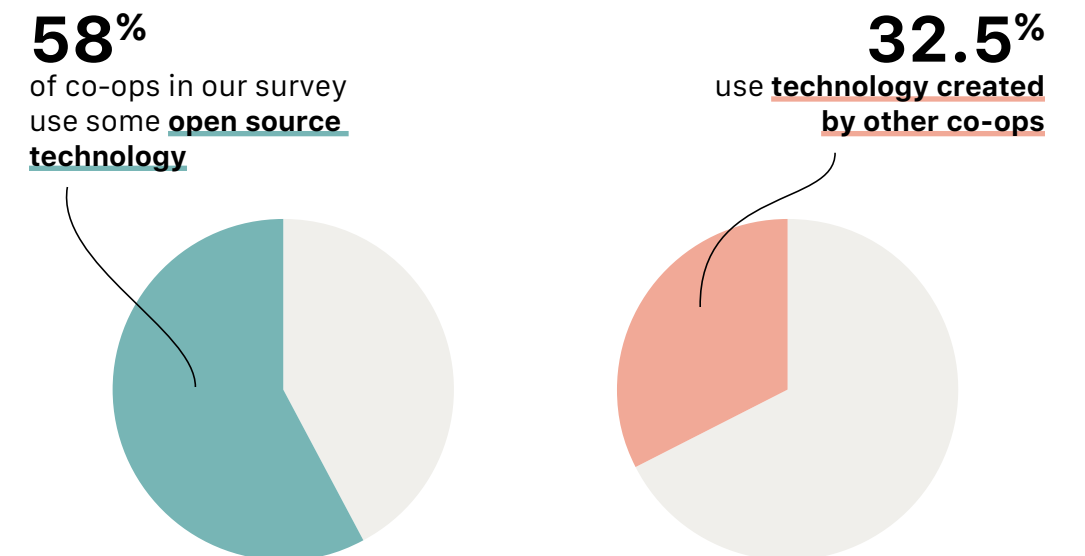
# Co-ops and technology

Just a few global corporations dominate the world of tech. Calls for creating co-operative alternatives, or platform co-operatives, aim to transform the corporate internet into an internet by and for the people, realizing its participatory and decentralized potential. But efforts to build such alternatives to corporate platforms are up against big capital and thus, unsurprisingly, struggle to gain visibility. And yet, online and digital technologies are important for creative co-ops. About half of the co-ops in our survey describe their business as internet-based and nearly 20% see themselves as a tech co-op.

As Kayleigh Walsh, worker-owner at the London, UK-based tech co-op Outlandish argues, it would be wrong to measure the success of tech co-ops by whether they are able to take on the corporate internet:

"that's not what we are going for, because we are going up against billions of pounds worth of capital. We don't have shareholders, we've intentionally not created that model. So it's a bit of a David and Goliath struggle [...] I think when you are messing about with that amount of money, it's very, very difficult. And I would rather choose to grow the movement."

One way in which Outlandish contributes to building the movement is by using parts of their income to build supportive networks of tech co-ops (see the profile of Outlandish on the next page). Other ways of supporting tech co-ops include using technology that is open source or produced by co-ops. The idea of open source aligns well with co-operative values. The more openly code and other forms of information are available, the easier it is to further develop, improve, and expand it in co-operative ways.



# OUTLANDISH

## Co-ops supporting co-ops

The London, UK-based tech co-op Outlandish is building websites and developing software and other tech solutions for large and small clients including, for example, the BBC, the National Education Union, and Greenpeace. But beyond delivering high-quality technology, Outlandish's main purpose is "to make the world a better place, which sounds really cheesy and sounds like a strapline that loads of companies would have – but we are actually trying to do that," according to worker-owner Kayleigh Walsh.

Outlandish was founded 10 years ago and formally became a co-op in 2016, although it was always worker controlled. Workers at Outlandish fall into three categories: members, Outlanders, and collaborators. Members are worker-owners with equal say on all decisions taken within the co-op. Outlanders have been working with Outlandish for at least three months on a freelance basis, with the prospect of becoming members. Outlanders attend all meetings and are invited to participate in all decision-making, apart from financial decisions. Everyone starts as a collaborator (i.e., a freelancer) and can either remain as such, able to come and go as they please with no intention of joining Outlandish as a member, or they can apply to be an Outlander and then a member. Currently, Outlandish has eight members, and works with two Outlanders and eight collaborators. This model allows Outlandish to both expand their membership, to collaborate with people who do not want to fully commit to becoming a worker-owner. They can also scale up when needed to deliver larger projects. Outlandish aims to create a healthy working environment and to be as flat-structured as possible. As part of this effort, Outlandish uses the model of sociocracy, a tool that uses consent-based decision making, organizing in small groups called circles with

designated individuals acting as double links between them.


Growing their business is not a priority for Outlandish, but growing the co-op movement is, "because the movement is more important than any one organization." In an effort to support other co-ops, Outlandish founded CoTech, a network of co-ops providing technology, digital, and creative services. CoTech is a way of encouraging co-operation amongst co-ops. Members can pass on work to each other, and co-ops also work together to deliver bigger projects. This is a way for individual co-ops to remain flexible so they can take on a diverse range of projects without necessarily having to grow and diversify as an individual co-op.

CoTech also offers peer-to-peer mentoring support, as well as a platform for skill and knowledge exchange. Walsh outlined the importance of transparency, saying: "We tell people how much we pay ourselves. We tell people how much we charge clients, we show them our staff handbook, we teach them how to do sociocracy. Everything is open source because it's a collaborative approach. And I think that all humans are very collaborative but it is kind of, like, beaten out of a lot of us and I think as soon as we can get a more collaborative way of life, then things will get better."

Another one of Outlandish's projects to encourage a more collaborative way of working is Space4, a coworking space that offers affordable working space for co-ops and people interested in co-ops. "It's the first physical space in the UK where people can come and be among co-ops." Space4 has a strong focus on community and encourages mutual support among users not just in terms

of sharing skills and resources, but also for generating paid work for one another. To make it as accessible as possible, Space4 offers workspaces on pay-what-you-can and pay-in-kind bases.

As a well-established co-op in the tech sector, Outlandish is commercially successful: "I totally recognize that we are really lucky in that sense [...] In technology, there is a lot of money, and there is a lot of work needed," says Walsh. This has made it possible to fund projects like CoTech and Space4. The positive impact Outlandish aims for goes beyond supporting co-ops. Walsh describes Outlandish's approach as "a bit of a Robin Hood model" that uses income generated through big projects to support social causes. While initially doing pro bono work for small clients, Outlandish moved towards a co-budget model. The co-op calculates how much profit every member would have generated. This amount then goes into a symbolic bank account and members can then pitch potential projects to each other and fund them: "the only conditions are that they are good for the world and that they don't benefit any person at Outlandish."

With increased demand for technological solutions, Outlandish has been in demand during the coronavirus crisis. Many workers have, however, faced a contrasting reality, experiencing job losses and financial hardship. Crisis often sparks a search for alternatives, so awareness about the co-operative model is particularly important today, says Walsh: "I think right now is a pivotal moment. In this crisis [...] one ray of hope that I hold on to is that maybe more people could establish co-operatives. [...] I think establishing co-ops during this time is very helpful and could be a lifeline for lots of workers." 



# Co-operation's challenges

While co-operatives reject a competitive logic and put people before profit, they still operate within capitalist markets, which are inherently competitive and care little about anything other than profit and growth. Staying true to co-operative values and principles while generating enough income to cover costs and provide decent wages for members is not always easy. In order to flourish, co-ops need to find a balance between business needs and political goals.

Co-operators are often extremely committed to their co-op. They want their co-ops to succeed economically, while also investing time and energy into creating and sustaining democratic structures and building a supportive work culture. Many also contribute to the co-op movement or engage in wider activist work. Given these numerous demands and pressures, co-operators can be at risk of overwork, self-exploitation, and burnout.

Contemporary society is riddled with inequalities of race, class, and gender. This also affects co-ops. Information about the co-operative alternative is not always easily accessible to everyone. Privilege plays a significant role in determining who can afford to put unpaid labour into building a co-operative business or who is able to take on the risk of becoming a co-operative business owner. Achieving diversity in co-ops requires awareness of structural inequalities and a conscious effort to challenge them.

Capitalist society in general, and education in media, arts, and culture in particular, often foster a competitive and individualized mindset, which can be a barrier to creating a thriving co-operative work culture. Running a business together without bosses requires high levels of mutual trust, support, and being able to share responsibility equally.

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**“Working in a workers’ co-op can be challenging and exhausting due to taking responsibility for the business and other stresses. But that shared responsibility, the autonomy of work, and the sense of directly contributing to the success and sustainability of the organisation are also incredibly rewarding.”**

**SURVEY RESPONDENT, MEDIA CO-OP**

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**“By holding ourselves accountable to co-op principles and union labor standards, we strive to model these social justice values in the way we work with one another and the way we serve our clients.”**

**DESIGN ACTION COLLECTIVE**

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## The benefits of talk

The co-operative principles have assisted generations of co-ops in building alternative structures and navigating everyday challenges. Referring to principles serves as a check and balance that can guide co-ops in making both mundane and long-term strategic decisions. “As a co-operative, we can always go back to our principles: Are we fulfilling those?,” says Danielle Gignac, a member of Arise Architects. While each co-op can define its own core values and set its own priorities, co-operative principles offer a starting point on which to build. They highlight that operating in a conscious, principled way is a core part of being a co-op.

Over 47% of co-ops in our survey reported that they discuss co-op principles frequently or always. A further 44% discuss them sometimes. Our survey suggests that continuous reflection about what it means to operate as a co-op yields many benefits. Co-ops that discuss co-op principles more frequently are more active in the co-op movement, report stronger member engagement, and tend to be more diverse.

Deliberation and debate are an important part of co-operative practice, with 86% of participating co-ops aiming for consensus-based decisions. Meetings are thus essential. It is undeniable that meetings have a bad reputation as being tedious and time-consuming, taking away precious time for more focused, productive work. In a corporate setting, meetings are often used to transmit information from the top to the bottom. Within co-ops, meetings can, however, be an opportunity for keeping the co-operative spirit alive, for discussing the things that matter to worker-owners – anything from pay, to working hours, to business strategy, to social impact and much more is potentially up for debate. In fact, according to our survey, meetings have a clear positive impact on co-ops and their members: co-ops that hold more meetings also report higher levels of perceived benefits of working at a co-op, democratic decision-making, and overall engagement.

**“I was drawn to democratic governance and ownership, and how radically it transforms your life, not only your working life but how you live as a person, what your values are, how you relate to others. How it liberates you as a creative, with dignity and solidarity. I felt a worker co-op is the best way to exercise my values and politics whilst ensuring economic stability and security. It allowed us to create a workplace that is an alternative to the extractive, undemocratic capitalist enterprise. And whilst functioning within capitalism, we, as the co-operative movement, build an antidote to it every day.”**

BLAKE HOUSE CO-OPERATIVE

## Solidarity against isolation

Work in the cultural industries is notoriously competitive and individualized. The sector relies on freelancers and precarious workers who are structurally pitted against one another when competing over a limited number of short-term contracts, funding, and projects. Opaque pricing structures and a culture in which success often depends on personal connections exacerbate inequalities.

Co-operative working offers an opportunity to reject individualized working patterns. It allows people to come together and support each other while navigating work in the structurally precarious cultural sector. Indeed, many co-ops seem to be achieving the goal of providing good work. Over 90% of co-ops that responded to our survey reported that they were satisfied with their working conditions.

Working with, rather than against, one another leaves cultural workers better positioned when negotiating contracts and helps cushion the unpredictability of market demands. Our survey respondents emphasized that there is strength to be found in co-operation. One co-op, for example, explained how their founders were drawn to “the idea of community, co-operation, [and] responsibility, how we are stronger together and can accomplish more that way than apart.”

This emphasis on community and co-operation was a common refrain. In our survey, a work culture that encourages teamwork and co-operation, a friendly work environment, and supportive work relationships is reported to be among the biggest benefits of working in a co-op. It seems that co-ops can open up a space that, instead of focusing on individual achievement, tries to meet individual needs with care and mutual support. As one survey respondent explains:

“it is extremely important that our co-op is the space where we grow, and we can always challenge [the] agenda of our studio and check it against members’ needs. Of course, we need to learn how to be more kind to ourselves and manage our workload with care. There is no command and top-down oppression.”

Co-operative working fundamentally challenges competitive ways of working and relating to one another that are dominant in the cultural and tech sectors and beyond. Co-operation helps to turn individuals from isolated competitors into fellow workers, thus laying the groundwork for solidarity.

# Recommendations

While this report is not intended to serve as a guide to starting a co-op, our respondents offered some recommendations in that vein that are worth highlighting.

## FOR PROSPECTIVE CO-OPERATORS

- Tap into the co-op support system early on.
- Contact your local or national co-op association for all of the guidance you can get.
- Reach out to existing co-ops in your sector. Ask them about how and why they set up as a co-op, and about the advantages and challenges of operating as a co-op.
- Meet with credit unions about financing options.
- Check out publicly funded business development programs and put pressure on them to provide professional support to meet your needs for co-op-specific insight.
- Embed diversity- and equity-promoting principles into your member recruitment plans and co-op policies from the start.
- Prepare a business plan.
- Give co-op working a trial run. If you're considering converting an existing small business to a co-op, try out elements of a co-operative workplace to assess the model's suitability and ease your co-op transition before taking the conversion plunge. Where possible, retain a worker co-op consultant to guide the sole proprietor and the new worker-owners throughout the conversion process.

## FOR EXISTING CO-OPS

- Practice the sixth co-operative principle: co-operate with other co-ops. Source products and services from other co-ops. Bank with credit unions. Establish marketing partnerships with fellow co-ops. In addition to increasing work satisfaction, participating in the wider co-op movement enables individual co-ops to contribute to something bigger than their own economic success and wider than their membership.
- Make a point of regularly talking about the co-operative principles within your co-op. They can be a useful resource in strengthening diversity and equity, guiding decision-making, and preventing organizational ossification.
- Stay informed about employment standards in your sector. Does your co-op meet sector standards? Can it exceed them?
- Meet with a union organizer who has familiarity with co-ops to discuss the potential benefits of becoming a union co-op.
- Advertise your co-op status: it attracts prospective clients.
- Explore the possibility of creating co-op networks to enrich structures of mutual support.

## FOR ASSOCIATIONS

**New and existing co-ops especially value networking opportunities, the sharing of new legislation, mentor support, and legal advice. Some co-ops would like to see more business plan consultation, additional legal support, local peer advisors (even a "local co-operative officer"), and leadership on workspace issues.**

**While an assessment of co-op development was beyond the scope of our survey, our research underscores the importance of strengthening this dimension of the co-operative support system. Co-ops also value efforts to lobby government for policies that promote and protect co-ops, including advocacy for amending tax structures and enhancing other economic supports in recognition of co-ops' contributions to local economic development and the amelioration of inequities in our communities.**

**As is well known, one of the greatest barriers to the creation of new co-ops is the lack of public awareness of co-ops. To raise the profile of the co-op model, our survey findings reiterate the need to campaign for the inclusion of the co-op model in curricula and incubator programs; to lobby publicly funded small business development agencies to better support co-ops; and to promote the work satisfaction advantages of working co-operatively.**

# About the survey

*Sharing Like We Mean It* reports on an online survey of co-operatives in creative industries.<sup>9</sup> We designed this survey in the context of academic research on media and cultural work. Scholars have produced extensive evidence of the precarity faced by freelancers, the self-employed, and other independent workers in creative industries. Typically, researchers have addressed conventional business settings. Rarely are co-ops the focus of research on working conditions in creative industries. We initiated this survey to generate a preliminary portrait of co-op presence in creative industries, to gauge working conditions in creative sector co-ops, and to assess the co-op model as an alternative work structure.

The survey was distributed to 446 co-ops (111 in Canada; 153 in the UK; and 182 in the US). To be included in the survey population, a co-op had to be based in Canada, the UK, or the US. It also had to operate in a sector included in the generally adopted definition of creative industries. To develop a list of co-ops, we consulted publicly available membership lists of co-op associations (e.g., Co-operatives UK), directories of co-op advocacy organizations (e.g., The Internet of Ownership), and informal co-op groups (e.g., CoTech). Because not all co-ops have ties to these organizations, we subsequently conducted internet searches to add to our list. We created three country-specific databases. Based on a review of organizational websites, we identified each co-op's name, location, web address, co-op type, sector, and email contact. Websites were reviewed to verify that the co-op had been active in the past year. While we strove to be thorough, we cannot claim that our population of co-ops in creative industries in Canada, the US, and the UK is comprehensive.

We chose to collect data via an online survey because our population was geographically dispersed and because our goal was to produce a general portrait of co-ops in creative industries and identify patterns

within it. Survey questions were divided into seven sections: Co-operative Profile (e.g., type of co-op, years in operation); Economics (e.g., annual revenue, perceived challenges); Membership and Employment (e.g., diversity, union representation); Pay, Benefits, and Policies (e.g., pay rates, hours); Co-op Identity, Support, and Movement (e.g., engagement with co-op principles, co-op association membership); Governance (e.g., meeting frequency, decision-making); and Technology and Communication (e.g., open-source technology, challenges).

While the majority of the survey was oriented toward generating quantitative data based on multiple-choice options and ranked and weighted lists, the survey also collected qualitative data via comment boxes throughout. A draft of the survey was reviewed by co-op sector practitioners. The survey was delivered via Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Invitations were sent to all co-ops in our database. The survey was open from September to November 2019. Respondents gave informed consent. Surveys were completed by one co-op representative, or together by more than one representative. Completed by 106 respondents, the estimated survey response rate was 23.7%. Data were output to SPSS, cleaned, and analyzed. Given the sample size, the research findings are not generalizable across co-ops in creative industries but are an exploratory basis for future research.

# Notes

1. International Co-operative Alliance, "Co-operative Identity, Values & Principles," [www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity](http://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity).
2. International Co-operative Alliance, "Co-operative Identity, Values & Principles," [www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity](http://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity).
3. Dave Boyle and Kate Oakley, *Co-operatives in the Creative Industries: Think-piece*. Manchester: Co-operatives UK, 2018.
4. The supplementary technical report, *The Co-operative Alternative and the Creative Industries*, is available here: <https://culturalworkersorganize.org/sharing-like-we-mean-it>.
5. The text on pages 10 and 11 is from the International Co-operative Alliance, "Co-operative Identity, Values & Principles," [www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity](http://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity).
6. This is not a list of survey respondents necessarily. It is a sample of co-ops in the creative industries across the countries represented in our survey.
7. The values in the table represent the frequency in percentage of survey respondents who selected each category.
8. As Canada, the UK, and the US have differing levels of legislated benefits and workplace rights, it is difficult to separate out the co-operative edge here.
9. A more comprehensive summary of survey findings is provided in our supplementary technical report, *The Co-operative Alternative and the Creative Industries*, which is available here: <https://culturalworkersorganize.org/sharing-like-we-mean-it>.

# Colophon

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