

NYC Worker Cooperative Development Initiative

Course Syllabus

Course Description:

Our current market-driven economic structure has unsuccessfully distributed wealth across individuals in the United States. The social and solidarity economy (SSE), an alternative economy that focuses on cooperation, association and solidarity has been increasingly looked at as a way to promote more “holistic” development efforts (UNRISD, 2013). Cooperatives are one aspect of this SSE, and through them the SSE is expanding. Cooperatives not only embody some of SSE’s most important features: democratic and participatory decision making, social cohesion and equality, but they also help individuals satisfy their needs, build resilience and expand their capabilities.

The Center for Family Life (CFL) has been incubating worker cooperatives for the past nine years in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. We have seen how our work has helped empower our community by supporting cooperative members in their quest for fair wages and dignified employment through their cooperative businesses. While this task has not been easy and has required a deep commitment in time and resources, the value of incubating all of our cooperatives is priceless.

This course provides an in-depth overview of what the role of a developer is as you incubate a worker cooperative or plan to develop a coop incubator program. We will cover models for incubating worker cooperatives; we will analyze some of the steps for creating a cooperative; we will think critically about the businesses you want to help cooperatives start by understanding the components of a Feasibility Study and a Business Plan; and we will also have guest speakers come and share their knowledge on the legal issues pertaining to worker cooperatives and how you can help finance a worker cooperative incubation program. Given that we have a specific way of working with our worker cooperatives, we will also go over the basics of group work methodology, to give you a better understanding of what our model of incubation has been grounded on.

Below is an outline of the course: each session, its date, the purpose, homework, and readings.

Please let us know if you have any questions. You can connect with Maru Bautista by e-mail at mbautista@cflsp.org or phone at 718.633.4823 ext. 21, or Rachel Isreeli at risreeli@sco.org or 718-633-4823 ext. 23.

Assignment Overview:

You will have several categories of assignments throughout this course:

- Readings are assigned for Session 1 through 4, along with reading reflection questions that should be answered in advance of the sessions.
- Activities are assigned, after Sessions 2, where you will apply skills you have learned in the workshops.
- All Implementer participants will complete a Feasibility Study. More information will be

provided about this assignment in Session 2. It will be due, along with a presentation on your study, on February 25th.

All assignments and readings are available in your Google Docs Handbook.

Course Outline:

#1: Developing Your Incubation Model

Date: January 14, 2016 (9:30 AM - 1:30 PM)

Session Description and Purpose: Our first session will be a general review of approaches for worker cooperative development, including developer and community skill assessments, as well as an introduction to the Theory of Change. Participants will continue building their model and plan for incubation.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

Read (Go to your handbook to access the links and downloads):

Recommended:

- [“Co-ops 101: Guide to Starting a Cooperative”](#) by the Cooperative Development Institute.
- Watch: [“Cooperation vs. Gentrification: Bed-Stuy Strives to Stay Local”](#) by Laura Flanders, GRITtv, beginning at minute 14.19 (although watch it all if you can!)
- [“How a worker cooperative factory is helping bring textile manufacturing back to North Carolina: An interview with Molly Helmstreet of Opportunity Threads”](#) by John Duda, Democracy Collaborative.
- [“Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation”](#) by GrantCraft.

Optional/Review:

- “Worker Cooperative Development Models and Approaches: A Brief Overview” by Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Michael Johnson, Jim Johnson, Len Krimerman, and Ajowa Nzinga Ifateyo in Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO).
- “Steps to Starting a Worker Cooperative” by E. Kim Coontz, Gary Hansen, and Audrey Malan

Complete:

1. Reading questions for Session 1.

#2: Feasibility Study and Business Plan (Assignment introduced)

Date: January 21, 2016 (9:30am - 1:30pm)

Session Description and Purpose: The purpose of this session is to introduce participants to the Feasibility Study and Business Plan. We will focus on the information and skills needed to complete the Feasibility Study, including market research.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

Read (Go to your handbook to access the links and downloads):

Recommended:

- [“Vital Steps: A cooperative feasibility study guide”](#) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- [“Feasibility Study Decision Checklist”](#) by California Center for Cooperative Development
- [“Damayan Feasibility Study”](#) by Center for Family Life’s Cooperative Development Program

Optional:

- [“ICA Business Planning Housekeeping Example”](#) by the ICA Group
- [“Steve Papa Business Plan Market Research”](#) prepared by Steve Papa for Center for Family Life

Complete:

1. Recommended: Theory of Change, “Mission” and “Strategies (questions 7-12)
2. Activity: Successful Startup Process.
3. Reading questions for Session 2.

#3: Social Group Work and Anti-Oppression

Date: January 28, 2016 (9:30 AM - 1:30 pm)

Session Description and Purpose: The purpose of this session is to discuss how issues of power and difference may arise in a group of cooperative members and how developers can help address these realities. We will review how group work methodology and popular education can be applied to our work with cooperatives.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

Read: (Go to your handbook to access the links and downloads):

Recommended:

- [“Theory: Anti-Oppression”](#) by Lisa Fithian and Dave Oswald Mitchell, Beautiful Trouble
- [“Infiltration: How the values of oppressive systems tend to arise in co-ops \(and what we can do about them\)”](#) by the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance
- [“The Four I’s of Oppression”](#)
- [“Assessing Organizational Racism”](#) by the Western States Center

Optional:

- [“White Supremacy Culture”](#) by tema okun, changework
- [“Coop Racism is a Recipe for Failure, or White Supremacy”](#) by Julius Jones, Worcester Roots
- [“Systems of Oppression”](#) in Just Conflict: Transformation through Resolution
- [“An Open Letter to Anti-Oppression/Diversity Trainers”](#) by Training for Change

Complete:

1. Reading questions for Session 3.

2. Begin working on your Feasibility Study.

#4: Coop Legal Issues

Guest Speakers: Missy Risser, Urban Justice Center

Gowri Krishna, Urban Justice Center

Edward De Barbieri, Brooklyn Law School's Center for Urban Business Entrepreneurship (CUBE)

Date: February 4, 2016 (9:30am – 1:30pm)

Session Description and Purpose: The purpose of this session is to provide an introduction to co-op legal structures, such as Cooperative Corporations and Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs). We will explore the pros and cons of each of these legal structures, and whether the type of business or industry has an impact on deciding one structure over the other. We will also discuss what some of the legal issues Small Businesses face, like purchasing insurance, taxes, accounting, complying with employment laws, immigration and the question of debt vs. equity investment.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

Read:

- [“Legal Entity Options for Worker Cooperatives”](#) by Edward W. De Barbieri and Brian Glick.
- [“Worker Cooperative Creation as Progressive Lawyering”](#) by Gowri Krishna (pages 117-127).
- [“Low-Income & Immigrant Worker Cooperative Formation”](#) by Edward W. De Barbieri
- [“Establishing a Worker Cooperative – A Guide for Community-Based Organizations”](#) by Center for Family Life, Brooklyn Law School and Urban Justice Center.

Complete:

1. Reading questions for Session 4.
2. Continue working on your Feasibility Study and presentation.

#5: Coop Financing

Guest Speakers: Julia Jean-Francois, Director of Center for Family Life

Lydia Jiles, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Michael Paone, Federal Protestant Welfare Agencies

Date: February 11, 2016 (9:30am – 1:30pm)

Session Description and Purpose: Participants will have the opportunity to learn about approaches for financing cooperative development, including how they can write successful grant applications and partner with funding agencies. Additionally, we will explore the ways in which cooperative members will need to prepare their finances in order to be in a cooperative.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

1. Feasibility Study

2. Continue preparing your final group presentations!

*** Please note: There is no session on February 18 ***

#6: All CBO Presentations

Date: February 25, 2016 (9:30am - 1:30pm)

Session Description and Purpose: This final session is an opportunity for all Implementer participants to present their Feasibility Study assignments to the rest of the group, receive some comments and feedback.

Homework (To be done for this Session):

Prepare for your final group presentation!