

# COOPS AS TOOLS



## OBJECTIVES

- Build skills for assessing needs in a community context
- Build skills for identifying when a cooperative is and isn't an appropriate solution to meet needs



## TIME

- **90-120 minutes:** This timing varies greatly by how many participants you have and how many stations you use during the "Cooperative Stories" activity. Dedicate any "extra" time, first, to padding the exploration part of the "Cooperative Stories" activity and, second, to the closing discussion.
- **Add 15-20 minutes:** If beginning or ending your engagement with a group using this training, you will need to incorporate an opening and/or a closing session similar to those in "Beginning the Work" and "Bringing It All Together," respectively. Refer to those sections for tips on how to introduce and close workshops.



## PREPARATION

### SUPPLIES

- Chart Paper
- Sticky Putty
- Regular Markers
- Chart Markers

### MATERIALS

- Cooperative Stories

### POSTERS

- What, Who, Why, !!!



## PREPARATION (continued)

### ADAPTATIONS

- **Audience:** Choose cooperative stories for your group that present cooperatives as relatable. Be prepared to challenge assumptions or mythology and/or encourage very specific questions relevant to your audience.
  - For example, one to two case studies used during every Youth TCI training involved cooperatives developed and maintained by young people, to highlight that cooperative entrepreneurship is not inaccessible.
- **Group Size:** A good rule of thumb is to post no more than one cooperative story per two participants. Participants typically take five to ten minutes to review a single station, keep that in mind when determining the number of unique stations and the number of total stations. It is better to have participants revisit a station than to not get through all of them.
  - If you have a large group size, you can post multiples of a single station so there are not too many stations to get through and participants have enough space to converse comfortably.
  - If you have a group of five participants or less, discuss a few cooperative stories as a group instead of posting them around the room. Take notes on a shared piece of chart paper to post on the wall for display during the rest of the training.

# COOPERATIVE STORIES

Some sample Cooperative Stories and prompts are included in the Appendix, alongside directions for how to create your own. A great resource for stories that could be adapted for this activity is *stories.coop*.

Tips to manage the activity effectively -

**Be Aware of Different Abilities:** *If some participants need to remain in place to be comfortable, arrange for someone who is comfortable and able to be mobile to bring station materials-one at a time- to seated folks.*

**Participate:** *During this session, the facilitator should circle the room and pop into conversations. The facilitator also needs to write their own questions/responses to the case studies and prompts.*

**Prepare for Discussion:** *At around halfway through the time, the facilitator should visit all the stations and jot down key themes and record provocative questions. These will be used to frame the subsequent discussion.*

**Keep Time:** *Give time updates every five to ten minutes so folks can get a notion of the pace they will need to keep to move through all stations before the activity ends. If you notice that time has almost expired and some folks haven't visited all the stations, suggest that they quickly skim all remaining stations during the remaining minutes of the activity*

During this activity, participants will read through stories about different cooperatives. Participants will reflect on and discuss the stories with one another as they practice identifying the needs present in a community, in order to understand “why” people start cooperatives. Some prompts are personal to lead participants towards beginning to examine their life, work, and potential for cooperative entrepreneurship.

- 1. PREPARE THE ROOM:** Create poster “stations” before the session begins by posting blank pieces of chart paper alongside a cooperative story or prompt on surfaces (e.g. walls, tabletops, windows). Be sure that stations are arranged far enough apart that conversations can be had comfortably at each station. If movement isn't possible for most participants or the space isn't conducive to movement, the station materials can be passed around between pairs or small groups.
- 2. FRAME:** Introduce the activity as a way to practice identifying needs or issues present in a community and to understand how those prompt a cooperative response. Participants will also have the chance to reflect on issues and needs they experience in their own lives and communities, as a first step to exploring how cooperative solutions could be relevant to them.
- 3. FORM PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS:** Ask participants to split up into groups of three or fewer on their own, or count off participants to assign partners or group members more quickly.
- 4. PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONS:** Share that participants should engage with each station for a suggested period of time (depending on total time).
  - A. EXPLAIN PROMPTS:** There are a few key questions at the bottom of each case study; each prompt is a single question. While answering the questions is great, they don't need to be answered directly - they can serve as a springboard for further conversation.
  - B. INSTRUCT FEEDBACK:** Direct participants to use the blank paper to write down answers to questions in addition to any thoughts, or ideas generated by their reading of the cooperative story or prompt. Anything goes! Encourage folks to both write down things that came up through group dialogue, as well as their individual reflections (if different). Additionally, get folks replying to comments written up by previous folks.
- 3. BRING GROUP BACK TOGETHER:** After the allotted time has passed, bring participants back to the larger group to ready them for discussion in the next session.

# UNDERSTANDING THE WHY

The intent of this concluding conversation is to reflect on what was learned through the cooperative stories, and to specifically explore “why” people start cooperatives. While “need” is a quick and easy way to describe why people start cooperatives, it is important to determine different needs in different contexts, as they are sometimes hard to identify. The discussion seeks to move towards examining how some of the “why” responses generated by the cooperative stories can be related to participants’ personal lives and experiences.

1. **FRAME:** Introduce the reportback and discussion as the time to explore the common themes in the cooperative stories that led to people creating cooperatives.
2. **REPORTBACK:** Move through a few of the Cooperative Stories and ask for the group participants:
  - What is the cooperative?
  - Who started the cooperative?
  - Why did they start the cooperative?
  - Was there anything about the story that jumped out at or surprised you?

**A. RECORD:** As participants reportback, fill out their responses on the “What, Who, Why, !!!” poster.
2. **DISCUSSION:** Using the following discussion format to direct a closing discussion exploring the “why” themes in the Cooperative Stories:

- Are all of the reasons in the “Why” column needs?
- Why might someone start a cooperative for a reason that is not a need?
- Are all the needs in the “Why” column needs of those people in the “Who” column?
- Do you know anyone who has had an experience similar to those in the “Why” column? What did they, if anything, do?
- Are there any reasons “Why” you might start a cooperative in your life or work right now?

- A. RECORD:** As participants discuss, write salient points or issues that are frequently shared on a piece of chart paper. If patterns or connections are discovered, try to indicate those on your notes by using arrows or other indicators.

