



# The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives

*Working for a Co-operative Economy*

## Occupy Workplace Democracy

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# Outline

- Brief Context of Co-op Movement
- Questions facing us
- The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives
- Resources

# The Co-operative Identity

Shared among all co-operatives

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.

International Co-operative Alliance, 1995 • [www.ica.coop](http://www.ica.coop)

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# Co-operative Principles

Shared among all co-operatives

- Voluntary & Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy & Independence
- Education, Training & Information
- Co-operation Among Co-operatives
- Concern for Community

# Co-operative Values

Shared among all co-operatives

- Self-Help
- Self-Responsibility
- Democracy
- Equality
- Equity
- Solidarity
- Honesty
- Openness
- Social Responsibility
- Caring for Others

# Questions Facing Us

- Why are co-ops useful models for OWS moving forward?
- Why organize co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?



# Questions Facing Us

## Why are co-ops useful models for OWS moving forward?



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# Why are co-ops useful models for OWS moving forward?

- Co-ops root capital and employment in their communities
- Worker Co-ops emancipate labor
- Co-ops as multigenerational asset
- Co-ops apply a sustainable, democratically/consensus driven economic model for sustainable movements
- A different economic model: serving members not profit, based on one member, one vote decision making





# Questions Facing Our Movement

Why organize co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?



# What is a 'meso-level' organization?

...institutions that are at an intermediate level between micro-level units (co-ops) and macro-level institutions (government, parliament, central bank, international organizations, etc.), providing intermediation of interests and fulfilling a series of functional roles toward specific micro-level units...\*

Roles including:

Development  
Public policy  
Promotion  
Mutual trust  
Democratic  
control\*

\*From Bruno Roelants, *Worker Co-operatives and Socio-Economic Development: The Role of Meso-Level Institutions*

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# Model a) Mondragón Co-operative Corporation



- Located in Basque region, Spain
- Started in 1950s
- First co-op in 1956 (Started with 5 employees, now has 8,000)
- Premised on Import substitution and social entrepreneurship
- Started co-op bank with entrepreneurial division (1959)
- Utilized internal capital accounts for development and retirement
- \$22 Billion in sales, 103,700 workers, 264 co-ops in 2009



# Model b) The Region of Emilia Romagna



- 4 million people
- 7,500+ co-ops (2/3 are worker co-ops)
- 30-40% of GDP
- 2 out 3 are members of co-ops
- Most co-ops per capita
- 10% employed by co-ops
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Co-op written law – 3% of surplus of all co-ops paid to co-op development
- High standard of living

# What can we learn from successful Co-op Complexes?

Shared Characteristics of International Co-operatives



- Clear co-op identity
- Co-op led movement
- Integrated investment in co-op development
- Focus on innovation, education & co-opreneurship
- Vision of a co-operative economy
- Co-op enterprise seen as a multigenerational asset

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# Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops

## Beginnings and Background



- Started in 2005 to continue energy and development of Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy
- Part of a new generation of interco-operative leaders
- Poses interco-operation as necessary to answer these larger questions
- Vision and focus on cross sector co-op collaboration



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# VAWC Region Characteristics

Worker Co-operation in western Massachusetts and southern Vermont



- VAWC: 8 member worker co-operatives
- Tradition of collective management
- 65+ worker members, 10+ apprentices
- \$7.1 million revenue (2010)
- VAWC system has increased in revenue and membership annually for the last three years
- Linked to/founded from social justice and/or environmental movements

① **PV Squared**  
 Formed in 2002, PV Squared is a worker-owned electrical contractor providing turnkey renewable energy system installations at homes, businesses, municipalities and institutions. PV Squared custom designs and installs:  
 • Solar Electric and Hot Water Systems  
 • Small Wind Turbine Technologies  
 • Micro-Hydroelectric Facilities  
 www.pvsquared.com

② **Co-op 108**  
 Co-op 108 is a worker owned co-operative out to change the world one bath as a time. We use only high quality natural ingredients, organic whenever possible. No synthetic fragrances or colors, tested on our friends, not our pets.  
 po box 108 • Haydenville, MA 01039  
 413-375-3705 • info@coop108.com

③ **pedal people**  
 A human-powered delivery and hauling service for the Northampton, Massachusetts area since 2002. We do pickups all by bicycle, all year round, at competitive rates - without the loud trucks or diesel exhaust fumes.  
 www.pedalpeople.com • (413) 586-8591

④ **Collective Copies**  
 We are a worker-owned and run union copy shop. We provide full service printing, copying and publishing, all on recycled paper, since 1983.  
 93 Main St., Florence 584-8829  
 71 S. Pleasant St., Amherst 256-6425  
 Drop off a job, buy books and co-op products at:  
 www.collectivecopies.com



Members of the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives.

⑤ **GALIAHOST COLLECTIVE**  
 Reliable Internet hosting services from a socially and environmentally concerned worker-owned collective.  
 Real Reliability • Real People • Real Responsibility  
 Give us a call 1-800-672-8060  
 Check out our site: www.galiahost.coop

⑥ **Pelham Industrial Group**  
 Group is a worker-owned collective that has been selling parts for and repairing European and Asian vehicles since 1972.  
 1315 Federal Street, Belchertown, MA 01007  
 Parts: 413 256-0457 • Service: 413 253-9302  
 info@pelhamauto.com • www.pelhamauto.com

⑦ **valley green feast**  
**The Farmer's Market at Your Door**  
 We offer residents Western Massachusetts a convenient way to eat healthy local, organic food and support local farms year round. Our produce comes fresh from the farm to your door every week. You can order online or call.  
 www.valleygreenfeast.com • (413) 588-8704

⑧ **Brattleboro Holistic Health Center**  
 Center provides services in acupuncture, massage, herbal, lifestyle, and dietary consultation. Formerly operating in Watercourse Way, our services and apothecary are located at 62 Elliot Street in Brattleboro, VT.  
 (802) 251-0888 • www.watercourse-way.com

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# VAWC Co-operative Development

## A Co-op driven Model

- Member Co-ops direct, fund and hold staff accountable
- Co-ops are founded with support from a system – not expected to perform/grow while isolated
- 5% of Member Co-op's surplus paid to a development fund directed by VAWC members for co-op expansion or new co-ops
- Shared knowledge and resources save time, energy and funds: Model bylaws and articles of incorporation; legal, lending, accounting, training and process support, etc.
- Development, support and funding is based on long term goals



# VAWC Co-operative Development

## Recent outcomes

- Completed two successful conversions, working on third
- Co-created Certificate in Co-operative Enterprise, at UMASS, Amherst ([www.umasscec.org](http://www.umasscec.org))
- Developed and initiated VAWC Co-operative Development Fund
- On-going ad and PR campaign: *Working for a Co-op Economy*
- Co-founded **Valley Co-operative Business Association**, a cross sector organization in our region



## Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives Membership Agreement

Version 1.0, Approved 4/28/10

### Preamble

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives (VAWC) is rooted in the ideals of co-operation, mutuality and solidarity. VAWC is itself an expression of co-operative principles — a “co-op of co-ops” that have come together as a means of strengthening the efforts of our individual co-ops to develop their businesses, serve their members, and contribute to the wider co-operative economy. Our core goal is to provide ourselves with the resources and support we need to advance our co-operatives, empower our members, and benefit more people in our communities. In joining with VAWC, our co-ops commit to solidarity as expressed by the following provisions of membership.

### Vision

.....

Northampton Hostel  
Co-operative, INC.

CONFIDENTIAL  
DRAFT BYLAWS, v1.0, 3/21/10

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## Mission statement

### Our Mission Statement

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives is dedicated to building a sustainable local economy by facilitating the growth and development of worker co-operatives. To realize this we provide support for our members, develop new worker co-operatives and promote worker co-operatives by educating and developing community awareness.

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for a Co-operative Economy*



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# Why organize worker co-operatives into larger, meso-level, co-operative support organizations?

- Gather resources – oftentimes scarce – to achieve vision
- Develop particular voice of worker co-operative sector
- Effectively communicate and partner with other sectors and like-minded organizations
- Promote, educate and develop *as a model*
- Remove strain from individual co-ops, calling all interested co-ops to the table, and managing demand of support and outreach as a system

# Organizational Partners

- Neighboring Food Co-op Association
- Green Field's Market (a co-managed 2 store food co-op)
- Valley Co-operative Business Association
- United States Federation of Worker Co-operatives
- Co-operative Fund of New England
- UMASS, Amherst Economics Department



*Franklin Community Coop*

is a cooperative selling quality goods to promote health and build a sustainable local economy.

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# Summary

Co-ops provide a useful model for firms as multigenerational economic entities rooting capital and employment, returning investment on behalf of community members

Meso-level organizations, co-operatively structured, allow for effective organization and communication of needs creating a 'virtuous cycle' between co-ops and their support systems.

Continuing dialog among co-ops and OWS provides resources, tools, and mission driven operations

# Resources

Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives

[www.valleyworker.org](http://www.valleyworker.org)

US Federation of Worker Co-operatives

[www.usworker.coop](http://www.usworker.coop)

International Co-operative Alliance

[www.ica.coop](http://www.ica.coop)

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