



2023 Annual Report

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Cooperator,

Thank you for being an integral part of our mission to expand worker ownership and democratic community control.

Cooperation Buffalo is celebrating big milestones this year: **we've helped cooperatives secure over \$1 million in loans, equity, and other start-up capital, and we've provided crucial support that has assisted the launch of 10 new cooperative businesses that are providing good jobs to workers in our community.** This year we also welcomed our fourth staff member, Mike Zak, who joins our team with 10 years of experience as a cooperative entrepreneur and worker-owner.

This Fall, **we hosted our fifth Cooperative Academy**, a 12-week training program where teams learn how to grow cooperative businesses that build wealth and solidarity.



Fall 2023 Cooperative Academy participants celebrate their graduation at Community Beer Works in November.

In 5 years we've trained over 150 co-op entrepreneurs through the Academy who are 56% Black, Indigenous, and other people of color and 65% women, trans, and gender non-conforming.

In 2024, we will begin the work of assisting Academy graduates with the next steps to launch their new cooperatives.



L: Executive Director, Andrew Delmonte and R: Board Member and Treasurer, Tori Kuper.

At Cooperation Buffalo, we know that cooperative, democratic ownership is vital for a resilient local economy, and necessary for those who have been denied access to build family-sustaining wealth. **The cooperative member-owners, entrepreneurs, local partners and national affiliates, staff, volunteers, and donors** that make up our growing cooperative ecosystem are driving more wealth and power to everyday folk, **strengthening our local economy and building democratic wealth that stays in our communities.**

Your support helps us continue our efforts to create "good jobs for tough times," and build a more resilient, equitable, and democratic local economy.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Delmonte".

Andrew Delmonte, Executive Director



Our Strategic Goals

Develop and resource a thriving ecosystem of worker cooperatives and other democratic community-owned enterprises.

“Eco” means “home,” and “economy” means “management of home.” Economies are made up of people coming together to manage resources and meet their needs through businesses, communities, families, and other enterprises. The core work of establishing an economy rooted in care, sustainability, and democracy is growing the number of people and enterprises that make up that economy. Therefore, a substantial amount of our work will continue to center on growing the number of worker-owners and cooperative businesses in our region that center these values.

Educate and mobilize a growing base of workers through popular education pedagogy.

Using the methods of popular education, we will raise workers’ class consciousness and demonstrate that a better world is possible through the practices and principles found in worker cooperatives and in building the solidarity economy. A strong base of working class people and cooperatives will allow us to engage more community members and decision makers in positions of power to challenge assumptions about local economic development.

Build solidarity among cooperatives, member-owners, and the larger community.

At this stage in our development, we have many international, national, regional, and local relationships that can be leveraged to strengthen the Buffalo and Western New York cooperative economy. We also have a growing local community of cooperative member-owners that can support each other materially. Using the infrastructure of Cooperation Buffalo as a resource, we will build solidarity both within the co-op movement and with the broader movement for a solidarity economy.

Increase Black and POC ownership in cooperatives.

An economy only works for everyone when it includes everyone. Cooperation Buffalo will prioritize cooperative development specifically with Black folks and other communities of color, who have historically been denied access to build family-sustaining wealth.

Develop and maintain internal infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing cooperative ecosystem.

As our cooperative ecosystem grows, our infrastructure must grow in ways that are supportive and responsive to the needs of that ecosystem. This includes maintaining relevant staffing and programs; practicing democratic governance and management ourselves; maintaining human, financial, and other resources that the cooperative ecosystem depends on; and developing a media strategy that emphasizes co-op storytelling and responsiveness to emergent local economic crises.

Non-Extractive Lending



Through our membership in Seed Commons, Cooperation Buffalo is able to provide capital to cooperatives in our ecosystem for a variety of uses including secured asset purchase loans, working capital loans, line of credit loans, start-up loans, loans to convert a business to worker-ownership, and more. Non-extraction dictates the terms for all of our loans and investments. Non-extraction is defined simply as the returns to the lender never exceeding the wealth created by the borrower using the capital. For more information visit www.cooperationbuffalo.org/non-extractive-loans

In 2023 we deployed **a quarter of a million dollars** of loan capital from Seed Commons to support three cooperatives in Buffalo.

\$250,000

Since 2016, we've helped co-ops secure **\$1,257,841.98** in capital, including **\$903,206.98** in Seed Commons non-extractive loans.

\$1.25 Million

Seed Commons Impact

40+

Locally Rooted Member Funds

\$45 Million

Of Seed Commons portfolio invested in Black-owned or BIPOC-owned business

12,765

Workers Served

Co-op Development

In 2023 we received 27 inquiries for potential new co-op projects, held 23 initial consultations, and made intake decisions to begin incubating 6 of those co-ops.

Since 2016, we have provided one-on-one technical assistance to 128 co-op entrepreneurs in Western New York, and helped 10 new cooperatives to launch or convert to a co-op from a traditional business model.

27 Inquiries

10 New Co-ops

The Healing Grounds Cooperative

300+

Hours spent in 2023 with the worker-owners of The Healing Grounds Cooperative, a start-up cafe on Buffalo's West Side

The Healing Grounds Cooperative's founding members are graduates of our 2022 Cooperative Academy, where they learned the foundational knowledge to enable them to launch a new cooperative cafe. We provided assistance to the founding members as they launched the cafe and provided them with start-up loan capital to make their dreams a reality. The Healing Grounds opened their doors in June of 2023 at 220 Grant Street in Buffalo to serve their unique menu of organic and healthy food with traditional cafe drinks and cacao. They have since grown a wonderful community of patrons that make their space feel like a home away from home. They continue to grow their customer base and menu selection to provide delicious food to the West Side that heals and energizes.

The Healing Grounds is owned and operated by worker-owners Asman Ndayisabwa and Anna



The Healing Grounds Cooperative's team poses together.

Schumacher. In addition to amazing food, The Healing Grounds hosts events such as yoga, open mics, comedy nights, and their signature Brunch and Beatz. This beautiful addition to the West Side of Buffalo is a place where all are welcome and encouraged to be their authentic selves. Check them out if you're in the neighborhood, order on DoorDash, or learn more at thehealinggroundscoop.net.

Farmer Pirates Compost

100+

Hours spent with Farmer Pirates Compost, a Buffalo compost pick-up service that converted to a worker cooperative after 9 years in business

Farmer Pirates Compost has been operating in Buffalo for 10 years as an offshoot of Farmer Pirates Cooperative, a cooperative of local urban farms that collectively purchased vacant city lots and shared equipment and resources. The farms had a need for high quality soil amendments which led them to start a business to produce their own compost.

Cooperative principles have been important to Farmer Pirates Compost since its inception, so the founders reached out to us in 2023 to assist the business with transitioning to a worker-owned cooperative. Our work with Farmer Pirates Compost included assistance in planning and implementing new governing documents, financial

projections, and operational systems for running a successful worker co-op.

The co-op won a first of its kind contract with the City of Buffalo to collect compostable food scraps from 2,000 city residents alongside their weekly trash and recycling bins. We assisted Farmer Pirates Compost in planning and funding this expansion through our non-extractive loan fund, allowing them to purchase a new compost collection truck and other materials needed for the contract. They began city pickups in September and are now doing an amazing job getting this new and much needed service to run like a well oiled machine.

Farmer Pirates Compost has added several new worker-owners and one new employee that is on their way to becoming an owner in the past year. They have started two additional municipal pilot compost collection programs for the towns of Hamburg and West Seneca. We are continuing to assist FPC with technical assistance and additional funding opportunities to help them with their continued growth in the coming years. If you are interested in hiring them to pick up your commercial or residential compostable waste or if you would like to buy their finished compost for your farm or garden visit their website at <https://www.farmerpirates.com/>. Rot on, Pirates!



Farmer Pirates Compost's new truck collects food scraps from 2,000 City of Buffalo residents.

Mondragon Village Association LLC

40+

Hours spent with the members of Mondragon Village Association, a Black-owned real estate investment cooperative in Buffalo, NY

We started working with **Mondragon Village Association (MVA)** in 2022 to assist them with converting their business into a Real Estate Cooperative. Mondragon Village Association is the first application of a broader educational and entrepreneurial project led by Dr. Curtis Haynes, Jr's "Leadership Academy" on Buffalo's West Side,



Mondragon Village Association's member-owners stand on the steps of their West Side headquarters.

which began in 2018. The long-term vision for the Academy has been a "nexus of cooperatives and cooperating institutions" including the real estate co-op Mondragon Village Association, the investment vehicle, and worker co-ops which will be tenants of commercial units in an expanded real estate cooperative. Mondragon Village Association is a Black-owned cooperative that currently has 9 member owners who are all graduates of the Academy and wanted to build generational wealth for them and their community to combat

centuries of structural disenfranchisement and dis-investment.

Cooperation Buffalo has provided technical assistance and loan funds so that they were able to successfully convert to a cooperative and purchase their first investment property. It is important to both Cooperation Buffalo and Mondragon Village Association that the properties they own and rent are kept affordable for low and middle income people in the neighborhood while removing their properties from the speculative market for long-term community ownership and productive use. Mondragon Village Association is currently working with us to update and renovate their property with additional loan funds and they are in the process of acquiring their second property. The new property has a commercial storefront that we are assisting them with plans to open a new worker owned cooperative business along with the residential units in the property.

Mondragon Village Association is an inspirational endeavor that is taking theory and making it real to build a new society that is cooperatively owned, democratically managed, and economically benefits the communities of color that have been systematically blocked from building generational wealth and power for their community. We are excited for what the future holds for Mondragon Village Association and we are proud to be a part of making the kind of world we all deserve.

Co-op Education & Training

A poster for the Cooperative Academy. The background is a map of Buffalo, NY. The text is in bold, blue, and black fonts. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a gear-like border containing the text 'COOPERATION' at the top and 'BUFFALO' at the bottom, with a small image of a city skyline in the center.

COOPERATIVE ACADEMY

At The Foundry, 298 Northampton St, Buffalo, NY 14208

APPLICATIONS DUE JULY 31ST

WEDNESDAYS FROM AUGUST 30TH THROUGH
NOVEMBER 15TH FROM 6:00 TO 8:30 PM

To apply or for more information:
Visit www.cooperationbuffalo.org
Email info@cooperationbuffalo.org
Call (716) 541-0407

For the first time since 2019, we held our Cooperative Academy in person! The five teams met with us weekly at local incubator space the Foundry, where they learned basic business skills, and all about worker ownership.

The teams refined their business ideas in a community focused classroom setting over a 12 week period, culminating in a pitch presentation to an audience made up of our co-op community! We are continuing to work with each of these teams to make their co-op dreams a reality.

150+

In 5 years we've trained over 150 co-op entrepreneurs

56%

Academy participants have been 56% Black, Indigenous, and other people of color

65%

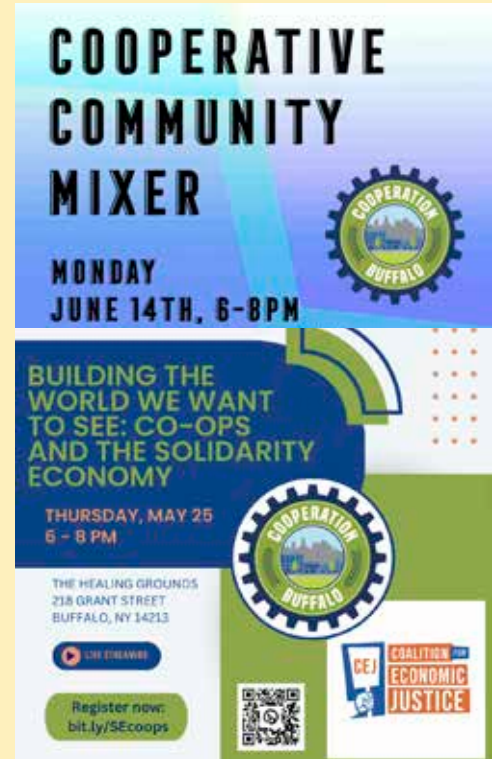
Academy participants have been 65% women, trans, and gender non-conforming



Co-op Education & Training

One of the Seven Cooperative Principles is Continuing Education, and it is in that spirit we provide free training throughout the year on topics including cooperative economics and skill building. In 2023 we continued our Popular Education series with bi-monthly Cooperative Community Mixers, workshops, and tabling at local community events.

We partnered with the **Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ)** in May to co-host a training called "Building the World We Want: Co-ops and the Solidarity Economy." In July, we hosted "Is a Co-op Business Right for You?" with the **SBA Buffalo District Office**. Our Cooperative Community Mixers took us to several local co-ops: **The Healing Grounds, BreadHive, and Extra Extra Pizza**, as well as **MLK Park and Gather and Game**.



Ecosystem Organizing

In its third year, our **#ShopCoopBFLO** promotional campaign highlighted small, local, cooperatively owned businesses rooted in our community. Our local co-ops offer a wide array of services and products, and meet important community needs.



In 2023, we continued to nurture relationships to support our co-ops and to grow interest in the cooperative economy. We held 5 mixers for worker-owners, co-op members, and co-op entrepreneurs to gather, exchange ideas, and build relationships. And in December, we co-hosted **Our City Buffalo's 2023 Anti-Displacement Summit**.



Cooperation Buffalo Welcomes Mike Zak

In April we expanded our cooperative team with the addition of our newest Cooperative Developer Mike Zak (he/him)! Mike is no stranger to the cooperative community. You may know him from “Gro-Op” a local worker cooperative he founded in 2013. Mike immediately had an impact on our team’s capacity, by bringing a diverse range of first hand experiences that make him an excellent problem solver and has a wealth of knowledge on how to run a successful worker cooperative.

Mike shares: “I’m hoping to enrich this organization with my first hand experience of co-creating and running a worker owned cooperative for a decade.... This isn’t just a job for me, it’s a calling that I feel in the depths of my soul.”

Welcome Mike Zak!



Our Affiliations



Workers to Owners Collaborative, a national collaborative of co-op developers and support organizations convened by Democracy at Work Institute (DAWI), works together to bring worker ownership to scale through conversions of existing businesses.



The NYS Community Equity Agenda calls for policies and actions that transform our fundamentally unjust social, political and economic systems, putting racial and economic justice front and center.



The Crossroads Coalition, a coalition of community based organizations that operates at the intersection of climate, economic, and racial justice, fighting for a Just Transition to a New Economy in Buffalo, New York.



The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) is the national grassroots membership organization for worker cooperatives, including more than 350 members representing 10,000 US workers.



The New Economy Coalition is a membership-based network representing the solidarity economy movement in the US, focused on the transition of our economic system from capitalism to a solidarity economy.



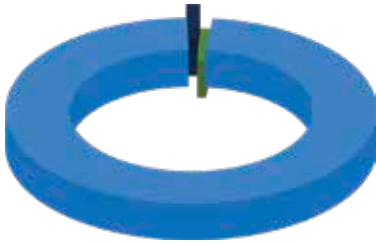
Partnership for the Public Good is a community-based think tank that builds a more just, sustainable, and culturally vibrant Buffalo Niagara through action-oriented research, policy development, and citizen engagement.



Seed Commons is built on the bedrock of The Working World. Place-based organizations from across the US have come together to build a national infrastructure of co-op lending and non-extractive finance.

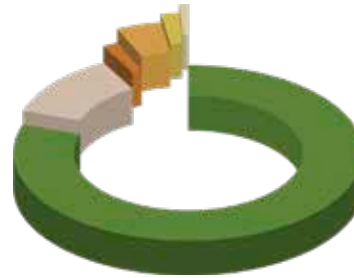
2023 Financial Report

Total 2023 Income
\$334,260.96



- Grants
- Individual Donations
- Technical Assistance and Consulting

Total 2023 Expenses
\$294,079.00



- Staff Expenses
- Contractors
- Microgrants to Cooperatives
- Program Expenses
- Office Expenses
- Other Expenses

Cooperation Buffalo is fiscally sponsored by Seed Commons. Income and Expense numbers displayed here are preliminary drafts, which may change before Seed Commons presents final audited financial statements.

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Director of Alumni Engagement and Community Relations in the School of Social Work, University at Buffalo



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Cooperative Developer



Mike Zak
Cooperative Developer



2023 Funding Partners

Chorus Foundation

Kataly Foundation:
Restorative Economies Fund

Seed Commons



Join the movement for economic democracy:

Make a donation

Use the QR code or visit www.cooperationbuffalo.org and click "Donate" to make a secure online donation today! Contact us at info@cooperationbuffalo.org if you have questions or would like to make a larger gift.



Get involved

Visit our website to learn more about the cooperative economy, how to start a cooperative, or how to sell your business to its workers.

Connect with us

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