

Cooperative Stakeholder Convening

November 29, 2023

K-State Alumni Center

Manhattan, KS

Convening Summary

On November 29, 2023, thirty-five Kansans gathered in Manhattan, Kansas to discuss the cooperative business model. The convening was organized by Kansas State University's [Rural Grocery Initiative](#) with panelists and speakers from the [ARCHER Lab](#) in the College of Health and Human Sciences, the [Arthur Capper Cooperative Center](#), the [Kansas Cooperative Council](#), the [Kansas Small Business Development Center](#), and the [Kansas Rural Center](#). Attendees included representatives from a variety of sectors: small business and economic development, extension and academia, philanthropy and nonprofit, government, renewable energy, childcare, agriculture, and more.

The conversation centered around how the cooperative business model has been applied in Kansas historically and other potential uses in the future. Toward the end of the convening, attendees answered four questions independently: *1) What questions do you still have about cooperatives? 2) Where do you see potential for the co-op model in Kansas? What needs could the model serve? 3) How can we chart a path forward, expand the conversation, stay plugged in? and 4) Who else needs to be in the room?* Below are the responses to those four questions.

What questions do you still have about cooperatives?

- How can we teach high school and college teachers to instruct their students about co-ops?
- What are the barriers to success for co-ops after they start?
- Is this the most feasible solution? If yes, how do we solve all the identified challenges?
- Are there types of communities that have more success (e.g. wealth, size, city involvement, etc.)?
- What industry sectors are co-ops most common in?
- More clarification on how an LLC performs as a co-op.
- Where are the lawyers? Who can help?
- Better definitions for legal structures and options that were discussed
- How have operating agreements been structured? Need examples.
- What does a co-op's bylaws look like? Is there an example?
- Who do we need to contact to push for co-ops with less than 20 members?
- What protections and rights do co-ops get and are those different from a LLC or non-co-op business?
- Can existing entities change to a co-op designation?
- Can you legally build a housing co-op just for Latinos or other socially disadvantaged folks?
- What is it going to take to get actual action in childcare creation and not just talk about it?
- How do we prove the value perception of childcare?
- How do we bring together all the right people to get started?
- This is such a broad topic that engages multiple audiences and creates a ton of dialogue.

- Technical expertise is not the main barrier. Need to identify and engage would-be cooperatives.
- We need to keep meeting about co-ops on specific issues.
- Just gauging by today's conversations, I think everyone has a lot of questions about co-ops.

Where do you see potential for the co-op model in Kansas? What needs could the model serve?

- Childcare (7)
- Local food and supply chain systems (6)
- Rural and frontier grocery stores, food services (4)
- Multiple / many / any sector (3)
- Affordable housing (3)
- Kansas' rural communities (2)
- Solar bulk purchasing
- Small business
- Microfarms
- Art
- Entertainment venues
- Community farmers' markets
- Coffee shops
- Community gardens
- Healthcare
- Homeschooling
- Minorities
- Women
- Migrant workers
- Manage shortages, excesses within community
- Beef producers / meat lockers / local beef markets

How can we chart a path forward? Expand the conversation? Stay plugged in?

- Co-op best practices, pitch competition
- Consider forming an ad hoc committee, represented by a balance of stakeholders, with the aim of developing 17.15 statute amendments, or a whole new amendment, to eventually propose to policymakers
- Support daycare, it needs more tax subsidy support
- We need a co-op to help co-ops, with lawyers and experts
- Are there ways to create communication networks or associations of co-ops? It seems like people recreate the wheel to found them and stay current; perhaps establishing a statewide network of some kind would help everyone involved and integrated.
- Creation of awareness for non-members, education and training to members
- Study co-op grocery store models in Bozeman and Oregon (Ashland Corvallis) Businesses
- Please keep having these convenings!
- Utilizing skills, cooperation between community

- I see the potential for a cooperative model in community resource initiatives such as Omni circle in Topeka
- Efforts to expand cooperative ecosystem would be helpful
- More information about how taxes and finances work as a co-op
- Increase awareness
- Tell success stories
- Newsletter. Perhaps a conference more inclusive of the public
- Financing institutions, lawyers, community foundations, coalitions, accountants, higher education
- Explore funding for these models, expand case study examples of innovative ideas
- Also focus discussion on each sector, such as childcare, ag, food, etc.
- Childcare co-ops need incentivized
- Podcast, tax benefits
- Make sure that the conversation stays focused on addressing needs
- Share regional success stories, updates, best practices, interviews, podcast
- Where do we even start to form a cooperative? It's hard for me to wrap my head around that.
- Keep coming together, and bring others into the conversation

Who else needs to be in the room?

- Lawyers, attorneys (6)
- Persons in finance (insurers, bankers, lenders, accountants, consultants) (5)
- Childcare providers (5)
- Persons with lived experience (3)
- Teachers, faculty ("how to spread education within their communities") (3)
- Political representatives, lawmakers, legislators (3)
- Co-op owners (2)
- Student leaders (2)
- Municipal and county employees, like developers (2)
- Moms (2)
- Business owners or advisors (2)
- Economic development agents (2)
- Grocery store owners/workers (2)
- Co-op founders, successful (who previously navigated the establishment process)
- Co-op founders, unsuccessful (whose coo-p failed or ended. What was the missing thing(s) that prevented success?)
- Social scientists
- Kansas Farmers Union members
- Community leaders
- Housing co-op members
- Kansas Department of Agriculture
- Entrepreneurial-minded, minority-owned nonprofits and organizations