Worker Cooperatives: Origin Stories

There are four ways cooperatives get started...

**Lemons to Lemonade**

Worker co-ops can be started by people self-organizing a response to economic crises, like the worker-owners at New Era Windows in Chicago, who started their cooperative factory when the owners of their former factory shut down production and closed the doors.

**Pass It On**

Worker co-ops can be started when retiring owners sell their business to their own workers, like they did at Select Machine in Ohio, instead of closing down or selling to a competitor with no regard for the well-being of their employees or the community.

**Build a Better World**

Worker co-ops can be started by people who share a desire to make the world a better place, like the worker-owners at Equal Exchange in Massachusetts, who created a cooperative business to better reflect the values they wanted to put into practice as pioneers of fairly traded coffee.

**Start It Up**

Finally, worker co-ops can be started with the aim of building wealth for low-income communities through the development and incubation of new worker-owned businesses; for instance, WAGES helps immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay Area start co-ops in housecleaning and other industries.

For more information, see: http://community-wealth.org/workercoops
Designed by Benzamin Yi
Cooperative Development in Low-Income Communities

Five strategies for building democratic ownership and community wealth

**Industry Transformation**
A hybrid approach combining the creation of model cooperatives with policy work and organizing to transform working conditions and standards across a single industry.

*Examples:*
Cooperative Home Care Associates, Restaurant Opportunities Center

**Co-op Academies**
An approach bringing together cohorts of teams in community-based classrooms to learn business skills and cooperative models, with the goal of launching new worker-owned businesses after graduation.

*Examples:*
Green Worker Cooperatives’ Co-op Academy, Cooperation Texas’ Co-op Business Institute

**Single Industry Replication**
This franchise-like strategy creates a network of multiple linked cooperatives in a single sector, with the developer providing a core source of industry expertise and cooperative best practices.

*Examples:*
WAGES, Arizmendi Bakeries

**Placed-based Clusters**
A strategy focusing on developing multiple co-ops in diverse industries, but located in a single geographic area, with the goal of creating good jobs and strengthening the local economy.

*Examples:*
Evergreen Cooperatives, Center for Family Life

**Anchor Institution Engagement**
This strategy builds on the place-based cluster approach by connecting the cooperatives with anchor institutions like non-profit hospitals and universities, who invest in local economic development by purchasing from the co-ops.

*Examples:*
Evergreen Cooperatives, Wellspring Collaborative

Source: Hilary Abell, Worker Cooperatives: Pathways to Scale (The Democracy Collaborative, June 2014).
For more information, see: http://community-wealth.org/workercoops
Designed by Benzamin Yi