

Supporting Worker Cooperatives in Sunset Park



Overview

In a moment of increased political complexity for immigrant communities in the United States, a certain type of response to protect and support immigrant communities better is also increasing: worker co-operatives (henceforth, “worker co-ops”). While worker co-ops are not a new concept, they have nearly tripled in New York City in recent years, and the leaders of the majority are immigrants (New York City Department of Small Business Services, 2016). Our goal is to illustrate worker co-ops as a means of empowerment, economic and otherwise, for immigrant communities, and to outline a set of recommendations for how the City, foundations, and other organizations can better support worker co-ops. This report focuses particularly on Sunset Park, Brooklyn, an epicenter of worker co-op development over the last ten years.

What is a worker co-op?

Worker co-ops can be defined primarily as businesses in which “member-owners invest in and own the business together,” profits are shared, and decisions are made democratically (Community Wealth, 2017). A worker co-op leverages the abilities of its members and accounts for their personal needs, thus building social and financial capital and bringing increased opportunities for individual savings, stable employment, and long-term development into a community. The majority of worker co-ops in the United States exist in the Northeast, the West Coast, and the Upper Midwest, and are predominately small businesses in the retail and service sectors.

How does a worker co-op work?

In worker co-ops, members are considered “worker-owners,” accepting responsibilities with their membership. Differing from employees of more traditional corporations, worker-owners democratically oversee and manage profits, decision-making, and leadership of the business. The business model includes a financial investment into the worker co-op from all worker-owners and their control over voting shares, with one vote per member. In worker co-ops, worker-owners can dictate their own schedules, decide upon pay and salaries, and design other arrangements that work best for them. In this way, worker-owners can create their own jobs and gain control of their own financial futures, two opportunities frequently unavailable for immigrants in the more traditional economy.



Why do worker co-ops matter particularly to immigrant communities?

In the United States, the fastest-growing form of worker co-ops is immigrant-led (Democracy at Work, 2017). The rise of worker co-ops in immigrant communities is perhaps linked to the inclusive, democratic model that mitigates risk of labor exploitation, tends to lack requirements for immigration status, and allows worker-owners to gain greater control over their financial future.



What is the Center for Family Life (CFL)?

In New York City’s Sunset Park neighborhood, immigrant communities have launched more than 15 of the City’s 60 worker co-ops. The Center for Family Life (CFL), a non-profit organization based in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, has managed a Cooperative Business Development Program for the last ten years, providing holistic training and resources on worker co-ops to low-income, predominantly immigrant, communities in the neighborhood. As a result, CFL has incubated the majority of the worker co-ops in Sunset Park.



Worker Co-op Profiles

Worker-owners best describe the benefits of joining a worker co-op. Additionally, directly engaging with worker-owners is an effective method for understanding how best to support worker-owners and worker co-ops. The following three worker co-op profiles are based upon individual interviews with worker-owners and focus groups with three different worker co-ops in March 2018. These conversations occurred in English and Spanish.



Golden Steps

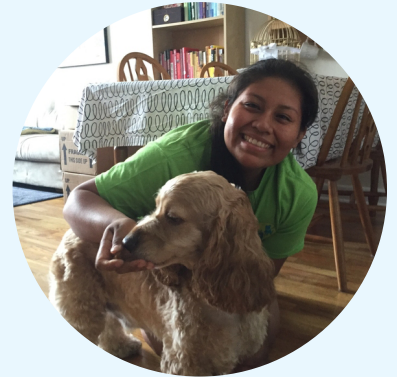
Golden Steps Elder Care Cooperative provides companionship and home care for elderly New Yorkers, allowing them to stay in their homes. While some worker-owners previously worked for an agency providing similar home care services, others came from factories along the East River waterfront that have scaled back their operations. Many worker-owners are immigrants, proudly having roots in Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Puerto Rico. In all cases, worker-owners speak about the tremendous impact of Golden Steps on their personal development:

"It makes me proud to be part of this co-op because I've received so much. The majority of us left our home countries chasing a dream here in the U.S. and, when we arrived, we realized it's not as easy as it seems to learn a new language, the culture, and how to live with one another. The cooperative has given us the capacity to do these things and brought the best out of us. In our market, there are many agencies out there that accept people through public programs, Medicare, Medicaid. It makes me proud that when people come to Golden Steps, they are willing to pay money out of their own pocket for our services because we are better at our job than the agencies themselves. We provide a high-quality service, and it is all of us working together."

Trusty Amigos

Trusty Amigos Cooperative provides professional dog walking and pet care throughout New York City's five boroughs. While some members previously worked in pet care or for an agency, others came to the worker co-op from the restaurant industry. The personal background of the worker-owners is also mixed; some members are New Yorkers over numerous generations, while others came from Mexico with family and are now making their life in New York City. The worker co-op affords all worker-owners an opportunity for greater control of their time.

"Seeing how it is to work in a co-op is different because you're an owner. It's good because sometimes as an immigrant, you don't have the opportunity to be part of a co-op. But the Center for Family Life has given us the opportunity to start this co-op and start working. There's more time for your family, your kids. I can take them to school. I only have to work a couple hours. But I can go and improve myself. I can take other classes. I can learn new things. I'm happy with it."



Maharlika

Maharlika Cleaning Cooperative provides eco-friendly office cleaning services. Formerly the Damayan Cleaning Cooperative, the founding members of Maharlika were part of the Damayan Migrant Workers Association, which serves and organizes low-wage Filipino workers. While Maharlika is outwardly focused on providing excellent service, it is also inwardly conscious about providing economic opportunity through membership to fellow immigrants and survivors of human trafficking.

"It enriched my knowledge. I'm handling the books of the cooperative. I already know how to do the balance sheet. It really helps me build up my communication skills. Before, I didn't do emails or use Google. Right now, it builds my confidence and my independence. I have the courage to talk to people, especially on walk-throughs. It improved me. When I came here, I just went to work."



Measuring the Success of Co-ops

Through both statistics and personal accounts, a case for the benefits of worker co-ops generally and specifically for immigrant populations is emerging.

Overview

According to the United Federation of Worker Cooperatives, worker co-ops have proven to be “an effective tool for creating a maintaining sustainable, dignified jobs; generating wealth, improving the quality of life of workers; and promoting community and local economic development, particularly for people who lack access to business ownership or even sustainable work options” (Democracy at Work Institute). Unlike those employed by traditional companies, worker-owners participate in distribution of profits, oversight, and often the management of their organizations through a democratic process.

Benefits to Individuals with High Socio-economic Risk

Data shared by the Center for Family Life (CFL) helps paint a portrait of worker-owners. Worker co-ops employ a group in Sunset Park that, on average, faces a number of socio-economic obstacles, risks, and hurdles. Of the worker-owners who responded to the CFL survey questions, the overwhelming majority (83%) is female. 89% percent of respondents define themselves as Hispanic, with 76% of respondents listing Spanish as their native language and 49% identifying as bilingual. A NYCgov Poverty report highlighted that those of Hispanic origin are at highest risk for poverty within the City (New York City Government Poverty Measure 2005-2015, 2017). Additionally, English-speaking deficiency is often cited as one of the largest barriers to employment for Latinos (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The Never Ending Cycle of Language Barriers). On average, respondents are first-generation, and the average worker-owner is 38 years old. 27% of respondents have some college education or more, and 18% of respondents were enrolled in an education program. Most respondents are married or with a partner (53%), have children (72%), and rent their apartment (85%).

Financial Benefits and Job Satisfaction

Based on the data shared by CFL, worker-owners receive a number of financial benefits as a result of their being in a worker co-op. Worker-owners noted increased personal earnings per year and increased average hourly wages. Within the worker co-op, worker-owners earn an average of \$17.13 per hour. Prior to entering the worker co-op, average reported hourly earnings were \$12.18. For those with supplemental jobs outside of the worker co-op, hourly earnings outside of the worker co-op averaged \$13.18. In interviews, some members noted increased stability in wages and reduced working hours as a result of their membership in a worker co-op. Worker-owners receive higher pay and higher benefits relative to other firms in the same industry. Worker-owners also find that being part of a worker co-op allows more opportunities to save and build assets. Worker-owners generally reported high job satisfaction. The worker co-ops included in the CFL data noted a lower turnover rate of worker-owners in comparison to that of employees in the same industry but not of a worker co-op.

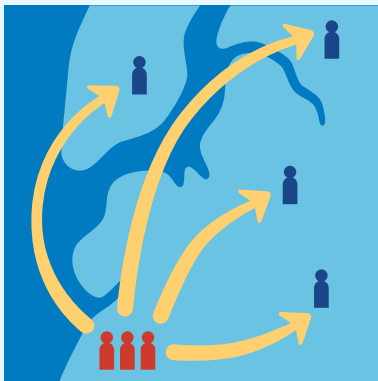
Other Benefits

In interviews, worker-owners listed a number of additional benefits of worker co-ops. Some respondents described increased flexibility in schedule. A worker-owner highlighted independence and increased wages: "You don't have to respond to a boss. You have the choice of taking a client or not. We also earn 3-4x more than if we weren't our own boss." Another worker-owner is appreciative for having a voice in a collaborative decision-making process. Some worker-owners noted that worker co-ops provide an opportunity for personal growth, knowledge enrichment, and improved communication skills. They found that, through working in a worker co-op, they generally had increased personal confidence. A worker-owner stated: "The co-op brings the best out of us. It gives the ability to do things we thought we were never able to do."

Recommendations

With the support of the City Council, the City of New York has invested in supporting worker co-ops throughout the City, helping hundreds of worker-owners and their families overcome social and economic inequalities. NYC Small Business Services through its Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI) supports various organizations throughout the City in providing resources to start and run worker co-ops, convert existing businesses into worker co-ops, and provide other legal, financial, and one-on-one support. Yet, New York City is changing quickly, demographically and economically. While gentrification may benefit certain worker co-ops whose services cater to young professionals, it simultaneously threatens the housing stability of some worker-owners and the broader affordability of property throughout the community.

Based on our discussion with worker co-ops and the Center for Family Life (CFL), the following are set of policy recommendations for the City and other advocates to better support worker co-ops and their members, in the context of a rapidly changing City. These recommendations arose from conversations with worker-owners.



Build capacity of worker co-op incubators to expand services to other immigrant communities

- Increase City investment in worker co-ops by increasing funding for community-based organizations which train residents to start and operate worker co-ops.
- Create incentives to expand these services to other parts of the City where low-income, especially immigrant communities, can benefit.
- Work with established practitioners to build the worker-co-op incubation capacity of other organizations, particularly those that serve and support various immigrant communities that have not yet been reached.
- Expand the diversity and cultural competency of existing worker co-op incubator staff to serve other ethnic populations.



Educate the public about worker co-ops to expand awareness and increase demand for their services

- Place general advertisements about worker co-ops on the subway or in buses with direction to an app and/or directory of worker co-ops across the City.
- Educate City employees on procurement with worker co-ops and include worker co-ops as a searchable category on the City's Vendex/Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal.



Incentivize a network of affordable spaces to help worker co-ops find meeting spaces

- Create financial benefits to incentivize local entities, such as Industry City, the public library, the Community Board, and others to create a network of free or low-cost meeting space locations for worker co-ops throughout the City.
- Support retail rent stabilization in gentrifying neighborhoods to control retail rents.



Target housing preservation and fair housing enforcement in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, to protect worker-owner tenants from displacement

- Ensure multi-lingual outreach on tenants' rights and resources, particularly related to fair housing.
 - Create safe assurances to encourage reporting.
 - Increase proactive auditing and enforcement of housing quality, fair housing, and anti-discrimination laws.
- Target landlord outreach to increase preservation of existing affordable housing.



Enable immigrant-owned businesses to obtain MWBE certifications

- Work with worker co-ops and incubators to identify barriers in MWBE permitting and certification processes.
- Open up opportunities for disadvantaged businesses through more equitable MWBE-certification procurement.
- Conduct more trainings and workshops around MWBE permitting and certifications that meet the needs of immigrant worker-owners.

NYC Worker Cooperative Directory



Co-Operatives

Center for Family Life / SCO Family of Services
 443 39th St
 Brooklyn, NY 11232
 718-438-9500
cflsp.org

Green Worker's Cooperatives
 1231 Lafayette Ave, 2nd floor,
 Bronx, NY 10474
 718-617-7807
greenworker.coop

Urban Upbound
 38-81 13th St 718-784-0877
 4-25 Astoria Blvd · 718-204-2430
 Astoria, NY 11102
urbanupbound.org

Worker's Justice Project
 365 Broadway
 Brooklyn NY 11211
 646-479-4769
workersjustice.org

Technical Assistance To Sustain Businesses & Create Jobs

Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative
 2431 Morris Avenue Bronx, NY
commonwise.nyc

Business Outreach Center Network
 85 South Oxford Street
 Brooklyn, New York 11217
bocnet.org

Community Economic Development Clinic, CUNY Law
 2 Court Square,
 Long Island City, NY 11101
law.cuny.edu

The ICA Group
 244 Fifth Avenue, Suite C230,
 New York, NY 10001
nycworker.coop

Community Development Project, Urban Justice Center
 123 William Street, 16th Floor,
 New York, NY 10038
cdp.urbanjustice.org

The Working World
 495 Flatbush Avenue, Suite 2, Brooklyn,
 NY 10001
nycworker.coop

Education & Outreach to Communities, Entrepreneurs & Allied Organizations

Democracy at Work Institute
 495 Flatbush Avenue, Suite 2, Brooklyn,
 NY 10001
institute.coop

FPWA
 40 Broad Street, 5th Floor,
 New York, NY 10004
fpwa.org

New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives
 495 Flatbush Avenue, Suite 2, Brooklyn,
 NY 10001
nycworker.coop

Worker
Cooperatives
Assisted by
WCBDI

*Magenta
denotes
Sunset Park
based
cooperative

ACCOUNTING

A Bookkeeping Cooperative
495 Flatbush Avenue, Suite 2, Brooklyn, NY
11225

ARTISTS & PERFORMERS

Black Women Artists LLC
104 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225

CHEMICAL MANUFACTURE

BKLN Clean
445 56th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11220

CLEANING

Apple Eco-Cleaning
42-72 80th Street, New York, NY 11373

Bio-Classic Cleaning
1231 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10474

Cooperative Cleaning
Business address not made available

Ecomundo Cleaning LLC
612 West 182nd Street, New York, NY
10033

Maharlika Cleaning Cooperative
406 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018

Pa'lante Forward Green Cleaning LLC
92-10 Roosevelt Avenue, Queens, NY 11372

Palante Technology Cooperative, Inc.
Business address not made available

Si Se Puede Women's Cleaning Cooperative
4202 3rd Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11232

Staten Island Cleaning LLC
774 Port Richmond Ave, Staten Island, NY 10302

COMPUTER SERVICES

Bits and Bites LLC
1231 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473

GLOCAL
Business address not made available

New York Technology Guild
8 Manhattan Avenue, New York, NY 10025

Position Development LLC
20 Jay Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

New Deal Home Improvement Company
164 West 79th Street, New York, NY 10024

Roca Mia Construction, Inc.
2304 Cornaga Avenue, Far Rockaway, NY 11691

United Handymen
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

DAY CARE

Beyond Care Child Care Cooperative
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

Bright Little Stars
50 East 102nd Street, New York, NY 10029

Golden Steps Elder Care Cooperative
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

Love & Learn Childcare Cooperative
774 Port Richmond Avenue, Staten Island, NY
10302

DELIVERY & MESSAGING

CBC Deliveries
565 Chauncey Street, Brooklyn, NY 11233

Workers Transport
195 Montague Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

EDUCATION SUPPORT

ActionOSH
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

OSHA Solutions
PO Box 8206, Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Sunset Scholars
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

FAMILY PLANNING

Uptown Village
2460 7th Avenue, New York, NY 10030

FOOD & GROCERY

Bed-Stuy Fresh and Local
210 Patchen Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11233

BioKakao
1138 229th Drive South, Bronx, NY 10466

Émigré Gourmet Catering Collective
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

La Mies Bakery
2211 Brookhaven Avenue, Queens, NY 11691

Tru Blend Catering Inc.
362 East 96th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11212

White Pine Community Farm
295 Duell Hollow Road, Wingdale, NY 12594

Woke Foods
630 West 135th Street, New York, NY 10031

GRAPHIC DESIGN

The House of Spooof Collective
838 Manida Street, Bronx, NY 10474

HEALTHCARE

Cooperative Home Care Associates
400 East Fordham Road, Bronx, NY 10458

SAMAMKAYA
119 W. 23rd Street, Suite #406, New York, NY
10011

Third Root Community Health Center 380
Marlborough Road, Brooklyn, NY 11226

LANDSCAPING

Dos Pinos Landscaping LLC
111-16 Rockaway Beach Boulevard, Queens, NY
11694

MARKETING

Kaluk Marketing
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

PACKAGING

Brooklyn Packers
360 Throop Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11221

PRINTING

L&S Printing LLC
188 Beach 116th Street, Queens, NY 11694

Luv Custom Prints
5012 3rd Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11220

Radix Media
522 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217

Syllable Cooperative
1980 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Limited Equity Properties
204 West 118th Street, New York, NY 10026

SECURITY

OnPoint Security NYC, LLC
4-25 Astoria Boulevard, Queens, NY 11102

TEMP SERVICES

All Hands and the Cook
495 Flatbush Avenue, Suite 2, Brooklyn, NY
11225

TRAVEL

Diaspora Destination
1231 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10474

WHOLESALE

Ometeotl
116 East Mosholu Parkway South, Bronx, NY
10458

OTHER

Anuket Ile
409 Morris Park Avenue, Bronx, NY 10460

Artisan Sewing LLC
3703 62nd Street, 2nd Floor, Queens, NY 11377

Bikes and Humans
Business address not made available

Caracol Interpreters
128 Linden Boulevard, Brooklyn, NY 11226

**Collectively Owned and Operated Platform,
Inc.**
3100 47th Avenue, Queens, NY 11101

Cooperatives United for Sunset Park
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

Friends of Light
499 Madison Street, Brooklyn, NY 11221

POLIDO Skateboards
1231 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10474

Solidarity Inc.
97-07 Horace Harding Expressway, Queens, NY
11368

Solidarity Research Coop
Business address not made available

Skedaddle Pest Management
7014 13th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11228

Trusty Amigos Pet Care Cooperative
443 39th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232



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U R B A N
D E S I G N
F O R U M