

A decorative graphic consisting of a large, colorful, abstract shape that resembles a stylized arrow or a fan, pointing to the right. The shape is filled with a mosaic pattern of small, irregular polygons in shades of yellow, orange, red, and blue. Below the graphic, the text "BUILDING MORE ENGAGED AND POWERFUL COMMUNITIES" is written in a blue, sans-serif font.

BUILDING MORE **ENGAGED**
AND **POWERFUL** COMMUNITIES

Cooperative Walkaround Activity

This facilitator's guide has been designed for the North Star Black Co-op Fellowship. This activity is not necessarily session specific, and it will be up to the facilitator and group to determine when in the fellowship this will be the most appropriate. This activity can be longer or shorter than 80 - 90 minutes, depending on time constraints, group size, and how long you give participants for the walkaround and the discussion. This activity could certainly be extended for to 120 minutes. That said, we only recommend going less than 85 minutes if you have a small group, or reduce the amount of walkaround panels.

Time: 80 - 90 Minutes

Participants: As many as are in the fellowship

Materials:

- Pens and Markers
- Paper + Large butcher paper or flip chart
- Walkaround Panels
- Materials for Multi-media stations
- PPT materials for instructions
- Optional music to play during walk around activity

Learning Goals:

Participants will:

- Explore important moments, leaders, groups, and ideas in Black cooperative economics in a reflective setting

Introduction (3 - 5 Minutes)

1. The facilitator(s) should introduce the activity, and provide folks with an outline of the activity, a breakdown of timing, and the relevant learning goals. This can be done verbally and visually.

Walkaround Activity (40 - 60 Minutes)

1. Before starting this activity, make sure you have done the below.
 - a. Tape/attach the printouts onto the top of a larger easel sheet
 - b. Tape the sheets (in any order) on the wall around the room, hallway, or space you are using
 - c. Make sure you are comfortable with the instructions and have a timekeeping device with you for the activity
 - d. Set-up multi-media stations for video
 - e. If you have any music to play during the activity, it can create a very nice environment!
2. Inform the participants that placed around the room is a “gallery walk” that features different examples and discussion prompts, including examples about co-ops, cooperative principles, economic systems, and cooperators. Put up a PPT slide with simplified instructions for folks to refer back to.
3. Have the participants form groups of 2. If you have an odd number, it is fine to have a group of 3.
4. Tell the the participants they will be circulating around the room in teams while examining these prompts, stories, etc. Let them know that they will have 35-40 minutes to move around the room and engage with the gallery walk.
5. Inform them that at each gallery walk item, people will discuss the questions, stories, and prompts in their pairs, and then they will be invited to add their own voices on the easel sheets. There will be questions with each item that they can respond to, or they can generally add their immediate reactions to the gallery walk item. People won't need to write an answer to each question, but they should discuss them all. It is important to underscore the fact that there is a lot of content, and that folks shouldn't be stressed if they can't discuss or answer every question.
6. In addition, encourage people to respond and interact to what other people have already written on the easel sheets. Let them know that they should view the easel sheets as living documents that will be constantly evolving and changing as more participants contribute.
7. If you're not in a pair (facilitators), make sure to move around the room as the activity is happening so you can check in on participants, see if they need help, ask guiding questions, encourage people to move along if they are spending a long time at one panel, and provide any assistance that may be needed.
8. Make sure to provide time markers for the participants, letting them know when 20 minutes are left, 10 minutes are left, 5 minutes are left, etc.
9. When time is almost out, encourage the participants to circulate around the room and read over all of the other participants contributions, so they can see how the group's thoughts have evolved.

With 10-15 Minutes left, move into the discussion portion of the activity.

1. After everyone has had a chance to review the gallery walk, bring the whole group back together into the full circle.
2. Once everyone is back in their seats, have a discussion about takeaways, what folks learned, and any questions people may have. Below are some potential discussion questions to facilitate that conversation. You do not need to follow them in any order, and you don't need to cover all of them. Feel free to pick and choose from them. You can also add your own:
 - What's your biggest take-away from this activity?
 - What's one really interesting thing you learned?
 - What questions do you have about worker cooperatives in Black communities in the United States?
 - Which of the stories from history really stood out to you? Why?
 - When and where have you learned histories of Black cooperative economics in the United States? Who taught you?
 - Among the people we saw in videos and excerpts from history, who did you find most inspiring and why?
 - Did you think of anything that relates to your own cooperative economic project, in any way?
 - Did you notice any themes in the different experiences from history? What were they?
 - What do you think are some of the challenges faced by Black-owned cooperatives in history, based on what we looked at? What about today?

Cooperation Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeKcBIgym1w>



- What does a “new economy” mean to you?
- In the video, Cooperation Jackson member Vernon Young talks about getting back to the ways things were in the community he grew up in. “Families, we all stuck together. If you didn’t have sugar, I didn’t have sugar.” Do you have community or family values you’re drawing on to be a cooperative leader? What are they, how did you learn them, and how will you draw on them?

Mandela Marketplace

<https://vimeo.com/19454832>

- What forms of exploitation can cooperatives help people overcome?
- What resources is your community lacking? What resources do you have an abundance of? (Think about defining resources broadly!)

Ed Whitfield of the Fund for Democratic Communities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig7zPPKCXKk>

- What sticks out to you in Ed Whitfield's comments?

Kali Akuno of Cooperative Jackson



“As a model, what it means is a group of individuals come together, they pool their resources to start a small business or a large-scale business, depending on how many come together, but they pool their resources, number one, together. And then they create a democratic structure by which they manage the enterprises together. So there’s no boss, other than themselves, acting collectively, telling them what to do, what their hours are, you know, what their working conditions are. These are things that they determine themselves. That’s the central, core component of it. It’s collective ownership and collective decision-making that makes it a real workers’ cooperative.”

- What do you think are some of the fundamental challenges that people face in coming together to create workers’ cooperatives?
- How would you describe the principles guiding conventional businesses? Do you think the workers’ cooperative model presents an alternative, and how?



Fannie Lou Hamer

“I know what the pain of hunger is about,” Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer told a crowd in Madison, Wisconsin. “My family was some of the poorest people that was in the state of Mississippi...we were sharecroppers.”

In 1969, Mrs. Hamer founded the Freedom Farm Cooperative with a \$10,000 donation from Measure for Measure, a charitable organization based in Wisconsin. The former sharecropper purchased 40 acres of prime Delta land. It was her attempt to empower poor Black farmers and sharecroppers, who, for generations, had been at the mercy of the local white landowners. “The time has come now when we are going to have to get what we need ourselves. We may get a little help, here and there, but in the main we’re going to have to do it ourselves,” she explained.

Local and state power structures did little to alleviate the economic burden borne by poor Black and white farmers. The government “considers us surplus,” Mrs. Hamer explained. Using the contacts she had developed in Madison, Mrs. Hamer raised enough money to buy land in Sunflower County.

She worked tirelessly to develop the Freedom Farm Cooperative. The cost of membership for the co-op was \$1 a month. But even at that price, only 30 families could afford membership dues; another 1,500 families belonged to the Freedom Farm in name. The co-op planted cash crops like soybeans and cotton to pay taxes and administrative expenses. The rest of the land was sowed with vegetables, like cucumbers, peas, beans, squash, and collard greens, all of which was distributed back to those who worked on the co-op.

Courtesy of the [SNCC Digital Gateway](#)

- If, like Fannie Lou Hamer said, “we may get a little help here and there,” what kind of help do you value getting?

Jessica Gordon Nembhard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaBvmnAves>

- Can you remember being taught cooperative economics? Have cooperative economics been a part of your family or community's heritage?

Combahee River Colony

Excerpt from Jessica Gordon Nembhard's *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*

“The Combahee River Colony was located in a remote area where African Americans established their own settlements and remained relatively self-sufficient and semiautonomous: the Gullah/Geechee communities in the South Carolina Sea Islands. The Combahee River Colony in South Carolina consisted of several hundred African American women during the Civil War whose men had gone to join the Union Army. They occupied abandoned farmland where they “grew crops and cared for one another.” They refused to work for Whites and were proud of their handicrafts and cotton crop, as well as their independence. The community became relatively well known as an example of Black women’s independence, perseverance, and collective spirit.”

- What strikes you most about this history?

WAGES (now PROSPERA)



“Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES) is dedicated to promoting the economic and social well-being of low-income women through cooperative business ownership. The co-ops provide improved financial stability for low-wage workers and expand the economic and social empowerment of their families and communities throughout the greater Bay Area. ”

Some Stories of PROSPERA's Success:

“Many business owners are constantly searching for ways to make more profits and that often means that the welfare of employees is shunted aside. But that can't happen at a cooperative, because the workers, managers, and shareholders are the same people. They don't need to make huge profits for owners or shareholders to stay in business, and there's no pressure to keep wages low... 'People can pool their skills and resources,' - Hillary Abell, WAGES

This “sharing of skills and resources allowed one of WAGES' businesses to recently announce a year-end profit of more than \$90,000 last year. The worker-owners voted to take 70 percent of that amount in bonuses and put the rest into growing their business.”

‘I've always looked for a workplace where one's *ezfuerzos* [efforts] are recognized,’ said Luz, who was fired from her job after fighting for her rights as a worker... After being fired, Luz turned to WAGES. After finding work through WAGES, Luz now earns \$12.00 an hour plus profit-sharing, a far cry from the \$8.00 an hour she earned as a hotel worker under harsh working

conditions. She is proud of her work, of the products she uses, and of her ability to help her youngest daughter through college.”

- How do you think cooperatives impact their broader communities?
- What kind of impact do you think joining a cooperative can have on an individual (psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc.)?
- How does the sharing of skills and resources help both individuals in a co-op, and the co-op as a whole?

Black Panther Party's Survival Programs



"You don't read about the survival programs we are doing on for the people, the free children's breakfast program, trying to feed some of these hungry kids before they go off to school in the morning. The educational programs we had going on for these kids, for the older folks as well. You don't read about that. The shoe giveaway, the clothing giveaway, the coat giveaway we had going on back east so these people don't freeze to death during the winter months. The free prison busing program, where we bused people from the community out to the prison, the penitentiary so the people can visit their loved ones who are incarcerated. You don't read about that. You don't read about the free ambulance service that we had going on in Winston Salem, North Carolina because black people in Winston Salem Carolina were denied basic emergency health care. You don't read about that. You don't read about the free sickle cell anemia testing program where we tested over 500,000, half a million people, before the U.S. government even realized that sickle cell anemia was a treat to the well-being of black people in America. You don't read about that. Why? Because there's no sensationalism there, no dramatic value, it doesn't sell newspapers, it doesn't boost the television ratings. It's just some black people getting organized to help some other black people."

Roger Guenveur Smith, co-director of PBS's A Huey P. Newton Story

- Do you relate to how Smith talks about media coverage of Black communities? Why or why not?

Black Panther Party's Survival Programs

An abbreviated list of the Black Panther Party Community Programs, 1966 - 1982. Courtesy of the [Black Panther Party Research Project at Stanford University](#):

1. Alameda County Volunteer Bureau Work Site
 2. Benefit Counseling
 3. Black Student Alliance
 4. Child Development Center
 5. Consumer Education Classes
 6. Community Facility Use
 7. Community Health Classes
 8. East Oakland CIL (Center for Independent Living) Branch
 9. Community Pantry (Free Food Program)
 10. Drug/Alcohol Abuse Awareness Program
 11. Drama Classes
 12. Disabled Persons Services/Transportation and Attendant
 13. Drill Team
 14. Employment Referral Service
 15. Free Ambulance Program
 16. Free Breakfast for Children Programs
 17. Free Busing to Prisons Program
 18. Free Clothing Program
 19. Free Commissary for Prisoners Program
 20. Free Dental Program
 21. Free Employment Program
 22. Free Food Program
 23. Free Film Series
 24. Free Furniture Program
 25. Free Health Clinics
 26. Free Housing Cooperative Program
 27. Food Cooperative Program
 28. Free Optometry Program
 29. Community Forum
 30. Free Pest Control Program
 31. Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program
 32. Free Shoe Program
 33. GED Classes
 34. Geriatric Health Center
 35. GYN Clinic
 36. Home SAFE Visits
 37. Intercommunal Youth Institute (becomes OCS by 1975)
 38. Junior and High School Tutorial Program
 39. Legal Aid and Education
 40. Legal Clinic/Workshops
- (This list includes 25 more programs)

- What comes to your mind when you see this list of community programs offered by the Black Panthers? (Keep in mind it's only an excerpt—there are at least 25 more!)
- Why did the Black Panthers operate these Survival Programs?

Federation of Southern Cooperatives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KMnzgfUKfg>



In 1967, 22 cooperatives, which were an outgrowth of the civil rights movement, came together at Atlanta University to form a “federation” of cooperatives. The people and groups that met that spring wanted to unite and create organization that would lead its members to greater access to the information, services and resources that they had been systematically denied.

The Federation came out of the South where economic exploitation and racial discrimination were patterns of everyday life. The reality was that low-income rural communities in the South were being left behind in the civil rights movement that was sweeping across the country in the 1960s.

The organization has provided services, learning and leadership experiences, saved family estates, reduced debts, increased revenues and enhanced stability for its members through producer, marketing, consumer and credit cooperatives. It has also taught techniques and skills that are of incalculable worth.

- Why do you think land is so important to this group?
- What “techniques and skills of incalculable worth” do you think the Federation helped cultivate?

Nannie Helen Burroughs



Founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls

Burroughs believed in the ideology of self-help which urged black Americans to establish and support the growth of their own institutions, despite the severe limitations imposed upon them by segregation and discrimination... Establishing a self-sufficient school for black women was not the only way in which Burroughs pioneered. During the depression, she organized a self-help cooperative in the northeast Washington community which provided facilities, without charge, for a medical clinic, a variety store, farming, canning, and hairdressing. The project, later called Cooperative Industries, Inc., became a permanent establishment managed by Burroughs.

“Anything that is as old as racism is in the blood line of the nation. It's not any superficial thing—that attitude is in the blood and we have to educate about it.” –Nannie Helen Burroughs

Excerpt from *Notable American Women: The Modern Period: a Biographical Dictionary*

- Nannie Helen Burroughs was an educator and a cooperative developer, among other roles. What do you feel is the relationship between education and cooperatives?



Cooperativa El Guabo

In 1998, 14 small-scale banana farmers in southwest Ecuador decided to take the tremendous risk of sending one container (about 38,400 lbs) of bananas to Europe with the hope of selling it directly to a supermarket. By cutting out the middleman, they took the power back into their own hands. With the sale of this first container, the El Guabo Association of Small Banana Producers was born. The entrepreneurs transformed themselves from individual, marginalized growers into a democratically run organization with access to the international market.

Today, El Guabo is a farmer-run co-operative with 350 small-scale banana farmers. Each farmer is committed to improving quality of life for themselves and their communities. In addition to earning a fair price for their bananas, the co-op receives an additional \$1 per case (approx. 40 lbs of bananas) as a Fair Trade social premium. El Guabo's members voted to spend the premium on education, health care, retirement, environmental projects and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, El Guabo is giving back to the local and global community by sharing their highly successful cooperative model with other producer groups in Ecuador and throughout the world.

Text courtesy of [Equal Exchange](#)

- What risks do you think you may need to take, individually or collectively, in your cooperative efforts?

Free African Society



Headed by black founding fathers Richard Allen (1760-1831) and Absalom Jones (1746-1818), the Free African Society was founded on April 12, 1787, as a nondenominational mutual aid society and the first dedicated to serving Philadelphia's burgeoning free black community. Members contributed one shilling per month to fund programs to support their social and economic needs.

Members in good standing could expect a number of benefits from the mutual aid fund. Particularly in the first years of the society, important aspects of support for members included payments for burials and providing financial aid for widows and other family members of the deceased, finding apprenticeships for

children to learn a trade, and paying tuition for members' children if places in free schools were not available. Over time, the society expanded to care for the social and economic well-being of its members by providing moral guidance, by helping newcomers to the city feel welcome, and by giving assistance during periods of financial difficulty brought on by unemployment or sickness. The society also took on the task of assisting the sick during the yellow fever epidemic in 1793. Members nursed the sick, dug graves and buried the dead, and transported the ill to quarters outside of the city where they could be quarantined and given medical aid.

Courtesy of [The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia](#)

Credjafawn Co-op, St. Paul



Historic view, Credjafawn Co-op Store, 478 Fourth, St. Paul, ca. 1948. Location no. 10744 pt. 1, Negative no. 20991. ©2021 Minnesota Historical Society Collection

“The instigator for the Credjafawn Clubs was that young people didn’t have a place to party. If you’re African American you couldn’t rent a social space, so you could gather at churches or you could gather at each other’s homes. That’s where these kids knew each other from. They

came from a young people's society meeting at their church and they went to somebody's house and they started talking about forming a social club like the other fraternities and mutuals that had been formed at that point. They said 'Let's do it on an equal basis. Let's have boys and girls be members. We'll all have a vote and we'll determine who the officers are of the club from there.'

That's a lot like a co-op would be formed. They would throw parties and picnics and benefits and host book readings and literary clubs. But what makes Credjafawn different from other clubs is that when they did get started they were also very intentional about doing education about cooperatives. They eventually formed a credit union in order to serve their members, so that they could build credit, buy homes, buy cars and so on. Things that otherwise they may have been excluded from being able to do as African-Americans. They also were sponsors of the grocery store that was formed in the 1940s around their neighborhood, so Credjafawn sort of stands out from the other clubs in that way. They are all about building power and a community resource, all those clubs, but Credjafawn was distinct in that it also spawned other entities, other cooperatives."

Drawn from [an interview with Tom Pierson](#)

- What are the different community needs that Credjafawn was looking to meet?
- What role do celebration, culture and fun play in cooperative movements?

COLORS Cooperative in New York, NY



In the aftermath of 9/11, the chefs, busboys, waitresses, and and more that worked at the restaurant at the top of World Trade Center all found themselves displaced and out of work, and with an ownership that refused to support them through this hard and turbulent time.

Rather than simply giving up, the workers formed the Restaurant Opportunities Center, now the country's largest restaurant worker organization. Many had a vision to create a new restaurant that was representative of all those working in it, and which they could own and control with dignity.

It wasn't easy, though. According to the blog *American.Coop*: "Dramas include losing deposits to shady real estate deals, visiting Italian cooperatives to court investment, debating whether attendance at protests earned sweat equity, and fending off a dissident faction that picketed the new cooperative's fundraising dinners." Yet, they continued to struggle, and in 2006, the former WTC workers opened COLORS, which reflects "the culinary traditions of the 22 countries from which our proud worker-owners hailed."

Content courtesy of Cultivate.Coop

- How can worker cooperatives be used to rebuild in the face of tragedy and hardship, whether on the personal, local, or national level?