

## Northcountry Cooperative Foundation Strategic Plan 2015 - 2019

*Cooperative: A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.*

### **Our Mission**

The mission of the Northcountry Cooperative Foundation is: “**helping transform lives and communities through cooperative enterprise.**” To us, our mission directs us to develop and support cooperatives – especially low-income, low-wealth and underserved communities. We help develop community-owned and democratically governed enterprises through training, development assistance, research, education and specially designed projects.

### **Our History**

NCF is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. NCF was established in the year 1999. Activities such as affordable housing development and cooperative trainings have evolved into the major aspects of our work. NCF is an innovator, an incubator, and catalyst for new ideas and approaches; our future is taking these practices to scale.

One of the most important things we recognize today is that the economic and social reality for many in our service area is challenging and that the opportunity us as an organization to facilitate positive change is very real. Through the cooperative business model and because of the work of others and the synergies inherent among the organizations involved in cooperative business development and finance - market opportunity abounds and dramatic social impact is possible. Ours is a vision that embraces housing not just for shelter, or work for a paycheck, but every economic interaction as an opportunity for investing in the human, physical and social fabric of a community.

### **Our Values**

Cooperative enterprises the world over are organized and operated based upon a shared set of values that are at the core of their identity as cooperatives. We share these. The internationally-recognized cooperative values include democracy, equality, equity, self-help, self-responsibility and solidarity. By creating an economic structure that embraces and values the contributions of all, cooperatives offer unique opportunities for wealth creation to the disenfranchised. By integrating values that emphasize individual actions with those that elevate the well-being of the group, cooperatives build social capital, bolster democracy and civic participation, encourage constructive skills and habits of mind, and provide a clear role and time-tested method for communities and community members to actively participate in the stewardship of those institutions that most deeply affect their lives.

### **Our Organization**

We have twin aims as an organization: to help people build great co-ops for themselves, and to be a great organization ourselves, staffed with individuals who share these two aims.

Our vision is of an organization that is innovative and creative, effective and credible, one that is known to be approachable, authentic, ethical and honest, both with others and ourselves. We seek to be an organization that is stable but not rigid, disciplined and purposeful yet collaborative and fun, and one where a sense of balance between home, work, and community life prevails. Ours is an organization that is a powerful catalyst for change, and one that is willing to take risks in pursuit of our beliefs.

Our vision is of a world where opportunities are plentiful, where the concept and practice of reciprocity thrives, where self-help and self-responsibility are uniformly embraced and systematically supported, and where economic democracy and concern for community are not special events, but everyday occurrences.

### **Our Work**

We recognize that as a cooperative development organization, we are stewards of a skill that is not well-tended in our world, that of supporting and encouraging democratic ownership and collaborative decision-making. We do many things that no one in our marketplace has done before. Our products are unique and operate on both an individual and an institutional level; our aim is to change markets as well as lives.

In our work, we seek to build institutions that are enduring, co-ops that will live one hundred years or more to serve generation after generation of members. To do this, we offer a sophisticated and integrated array of services that will support, encourage and assist cooperative enterprises at whatever stage of their development, providing targeted and transformational resources for community self-help. We aim to support all cooperative sectors.

Having identified what we believe to be a vast, mission rich opportunity and after achieving alignment with affordable housing partners around our work, our development activities will be focused on manufactured housing cooperative conversions for the foreseeable future. Our service area is centered in the Upper Midwest. Our core services include: housing development, training and information, and research and development.

### **Our Goals**

In pursuit of our vision and strategic mission we have set the following goals, recognizing that new and different opportunities may arise over time.

**Goal 1: Support the creation of more cooperatives and better cooperatives, particularly those serving low-income, low-wealth, rural, minority or other under-served communities.**

- ◆ Implement an efficient and systematic approach to manufactured home park cooperative conversions with the ability to convert several communities per year;

- ◆ Continue to work with and support the specialized property management company we started (Common Properties Management Cooperative) to ensure quality service to the cooperative housing sector and to enable CPMC to thrive;
- ◆ Continue to develop an expertise and capacity in organizational development that is widely recognized for its efficacy;
- ◆ Explore the potential to create newly constructed manufactured home park cooperatives

**Goal 2: Enhance Affordable Housing financing options available to cooperative enterprises and their members:**

- ◆ Create opportunities in each of the following areas:
  - **Manufactured Home Community Financing** - identify sources and help design loan products to support new co-op development;
  - **Manufactured Home Financing** – help create better availability and financing terms for manufactured home purchases including Down Payment Assistance and other supportive programming;
- ◆ **Create new programs and services**
  - **Homebuyer education on MH as a housing type**
  - **Credit Counseling / Repair**
- ◆ **Ancillary Program Development** – design, develop, capitalize and implement a variety of programs in support of affordable cooperative housing development.
- ◆ Leverage additional resource investment from our partners, supporters and cooperatives.

**Goal 3: Be a key source of information about cooperatives broadly, encouraging their use and practice amongst a wide variety of people; foster a network of healthy, well-functioning cooperatives, with well-trained, deliberative, focused and fair leadership;**

- ◆ Deliver training and support services that are fun and inspiring for participants and based upon the concepts of peer learning and self-help, and upon the conviction that leadership potential exists in all groups and at all levels; develop national reputation for such.
- ◆ Train 500 cooperative board and staff members through our events and materials;
- ◆ Reach out to students and youth to educate them on the potential of the cooperative model to deliver things of value;
- ◆ Create a user friendly web site with best practice information about cooperative practice;
- ◆ Expand our repertoire of tools for co-op boards and members to include a range of manuals, spread sheets models and other self-help resources;
- ◆ Create a financial literacy program specifically for cooperatives’ members with the goal of helping members of worker and housing cooperatives understand the functioning of their cooperative enterprises in the context of their own financial situations;
- ◆ Be a center for the best information and advice on a wide range of financial, legal, structural and organizational issues related to cooperatives.

**Goal 4: Be a center for the practice of creative innovation in the cooperative sector.**

- ◆ Pursue opportunities to put the cooperative model to work in new, innovative and high impact ways that are both economically viable and promote positive systemic change;
- ◆ Encourage creative philanthropy in support of cooperative enterprise and development;
- ◆ Integrate environmentally sustainable practices in all the work that we do.

**Goal 5: Build a strong, stable and enduring enterprise.**

- ◆ Pursue a healthy mix of revenue sources with a 2019 goal of 80% of all NCF revenues being earned;
- ◆ Support an efficient operations system;
- ◆ Maintain a widespread reputation for excellent and personal customer service;
- ◆ Lay the groundwork of financial stability; create a reserve of at least six months of operating cash;
- ◆ Participate in a national network of cooperative experts, stakeholders, partners and organizations;
- ◆ Have impact – know what impact we want to have and systematically track our results;
- ◆ Regularly reach out and engage others in a dialogue about cooperatives as a viable economic strategy.

**Goal 6: Support an organizational culture that is welcoming of a diversity of background and experience, that encourages teamwork, that nourishes employees' creativity and enhances professional development while recognizing the importance of balance between home, work and community life.**

- ◆ Support a benefits and compensation system that recognizes employees for the valuable and strategic assets that they are;
- ◆ Allocate both the time and the resources necessary to establish a climate that encourages a sense of camaraderie in the organization;
- ◆ Provide widespread access to professional development opportunities for staff through regular internal, external and self-directed training opportunities. Encourage understanding and capacity building broadly across the organization;
- ◆ Balance the demands of our vision with the need for healthy home and community lives; understanding that respect for the latter is vital to the success of the former.