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## Section 1

# Introduction

*June 10, 2013*

Eight years ago, on a grassy knoll at the University of Southern New Hampshire, a small group of Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy attendees gathered to share ideas about “directories” of cooperative economic initiatives. It became clear that we had shared aspirations: we all wanted a comprehensive, accessible, dynamic and easily-updated online directory to support our various organizing, development and education efforts. We all wanted this directory to be customizable, easily made to display listings to our members or constituents under the banner of our own unique organizations or framings. We also quickly understood that in the absence of a collaborative effort, we might end up reinventing the wheel five times over. Was it possible to build a single tool – collectively and cooperatively – that could meet all of our needs while enacting our values at the same time? We thought that the answer was “yes.” And so the Data Commons Project was born.

In July 2012 we incorporated as the Data Commons Cooperative and began recruiting members. Now in June 2013, we are nineteen members strong and growing. This week, we will hold our first Annual General Meeting.

It hasn’t always been easy along the way. Despite many shared cooperative values, getting multiple organizations to work together, forge a common vision that meets all of their needs, and share one of their most precious assets – their contact database – with each other and (at least, in part) with the world, is a real challenge. Many of our institutions have adopted a culture that I call “thinking like an organization” instead of one that encourages us to “think like a movement.” For many good reasons, we tend to focus on our own organization’s work as the ultimate end, competing with each other for scarce funding to accomplish our crucial missions and clutching tight to our sense that we each need to be “the” leader in the field. Sharing our data, and creating a common software tool that highlights collaboration rather than a single organization’s heroic efforts, seems terrifying! This is thinking like an organization. Thinking like a movement means recognizing that our organizations are experimental attempts to sustain the work of broader social and economic change. To work for real change demands that we ourselves must be willing to change, to learn, to grow into new forms and discover new strategies for enacting our visions and values. Thinking like a movement means building commons — shared pools of knowledge, information, skills and other resources that support not only our own efforts, but the also-crucial efforts of others we may not even know. This is what the Data



*Ethan Miller*  
*Co-op President*

Commons Cooperative challenges us all to do.

Of course, we've also been designing our commons in a way that meets the real needs of individual member organizations, and so we've developed multiple ways to share data into the common pool while also retaining our unique identities as organizations. The U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, one of our most steadfast founding members, shares its directory with the whole commons (and benefits from that commons, in turn) while also displaying a custom filtered set of listings at [usworker.find.coop](https://usworker.find.coop). This is just one example of possible configurations for balancing the visibility of individual member organizations with the collective "movement" spirit of the larger Data Commons effort.

Perhaps our greatest challenge as an emerging cooperative project has been finding the financial support necessary to become a self-sustaining cooperative. Our work isn't "sexy," it involves lots of invisible programming and database work, and it doesn't fit well with the specific missions of most funding organizations. Indeed, many funders are inclined to fund organizing rather than the development of crucial tools to support and enable this organizing. Because of these challenges, we've relied in part on small but important contributions from the Cooperative Charitable Trust, Equal Exchange, and a significant business start-up grant from the USDA, and in (perhaps much larger) part on tireless volunteer work on the part of our tech developers, Board members and other allies. And we have come a long way: you, our members, have dedicated yourselves to joining this cooperative effort and sharing your resources in support of it. Our growing critical mass will enable us to become more visible and more effective at efforts to fund crucial new organizational and technical development. The common pool of data that we are collecting is needed now more than ever, as people increasingly recognize our common need to strengthen emerging new economies of cooperation and solidarity in the face of an unjust and unstable status quo. We are ready to take up the task of providing key informational resources to all of those working to build a different way of sustaining our communities and livelihoods in the coming decades.

If the Data Commons Cooperative has one core attribute that remains consistent over the eight years since its conception, it is tireless and joyful dedication on the part of its participants. We work hard, we care about the work that we do, and we enjoy working and dreaming together. We are thrilled to welcome all of you, our new members, into this community that we are building together. We encourage you to share your ideas and your energy toward strengthening our commons. Let's think together like a movement!

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ethan Miller", written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ethan Miller  
President, Data Commons Cooperative

## Section 2

# Name and place of business

The legal name of the co-op is:

THE DATA COMMONS COOPERATIVE, INC.
------------------------------------

It is registered as a Mercantile Co-Operative with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with ID number 001083005. Its date of incorporation in Massachusetts is July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The location of the co-op's office is:

21 GOODNOW RD.  
SHELBURNE FALLS  
MA 01370, USA

Board members and the operation and tech teams are from all over, collaborating by email and teleconference. There may well be someone not too far from you who is, or has been involved in the Data Commons, so let us know if you are interested in meeting up in person.



*Bridge of Flowers*  
*Shelburne Falls*  
(photo by: [masstravel](#))

## Section 3

# Members of the co-op

There are currently **19** members of the co-op. In alphabetical order they are:

- ▷ Canadian Worker Co-op Federation
- ▷ Carolina Common Enterprise
- ▷ Cooperation Works!
- ▷ Cooperative Development Institute
- ▷ Cooperative Fund of New England
- ▷ Cooperative Maine
- ▷ Cultivate.Coop
- ▷ Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy
- ▷ Food Co-op Initiative
- ▷ Grassroots Economic Organizing
- ▷ hOurworld
- ▷ Manitoba Cooperative Association
- ▷ New Economics Institute
- ▷ North American Students of Co-operation
- ▷ Northwest Cooperative Development Center
- ▷ Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Co-op Development Center
- ▷ Sarapis Foundation
- ▷ Solidarity NYC
- ▷ US Federation of Worker Co-ops

We give brief descriptions of the members here.

### 3.1 Canadian Worker Co-op Federation

CWCF has been committed to helping to build a (worker) co-operative economy since its founding in 1991. We drafted & signed the “[Quebec Declaration](#)” in 2011. Below is an excerpt:

“We have the mission to help worker co-operatives build a new world with a just and caring human face. In signing this Declaration, we pledge to do everything possible, in accordance with our values, to accomplish this mission:

- ▷ by facilitating the creation of new worker co-operatives,
- ▷ by facilitating the harmonious development of our co-operative members, and

- ▷ by partnering with all organizations sharing both this vision and the will to act for the emergence of this new mode of equitable, sustainable socio-economic development ...”

### **3.2 Carolina Common Enterprise**

Organized as a new cooperative development center for North Carolina.

### **3.3 Cooperation Works!**

CooperationWorks! is a national organization of cooperative development centers and practitioners that span the breadth of the United States. Using innovative strategies and proven business practices, CW Centers provide expertise across all aspects of co-op enterprise development, including feasibility analysis, business plan development, business launch and on-going training for operational success.

### **3.4 Cooperative Development Institute**

Our mission is to develop the cooperative economy in the Northeast through supporting co-ops and networks. We provide direct business assistance, training, and networking. We have been supporting the Data Commons project since its inception in 2005, and helped it incorporate into a co-op last year.

### **3.5 Cooperative Fund of New England**

For 38 years, CFNE has raised social investment from individuals and institutions and has made over 630 loans with these funds totaling over \$29 million. Most of these funds have been made to co-ops, including in the grocery, housing, worker, and agricultural sectors.

### **3.6 Cooperative Maine**

Our mission is to promote increased development of cooperatives in Maine through supporting existing cooperatives and helping new ones form. Cooperative Maine was formed in the spring of 2007 by members of co-ops and others interested in promoting a more humane, egalitarian, and democratic economy and society.

### **3.7 Cultivate.Coop**

**Cultivate.Coop** democratizes knowledge and information about co-ops and cooperatives. We have thousands of visitors a month.

### **3.8 Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy**

The Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy (ECWD) is a non-profit cooperative organization established to aid in the continued growth of the workplace democracy movement. The ECWD is managed by the Coordinating Council. The ECWD works in cooperation with the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives to promote and develop worker-owned enterprises regionally and nationally.



### **3.9 Food Co-op Initiative**

The Food Co-op Initiative Program is a 501(c)3 non-profit, dedicated to enabling a faster and more efficient start-up process to develop new retail grocery co-ops.

### **3.10 Grassroots Economic Organizing**

We create and share stories, news and analysis about cooperative and solidarity economy organizing efforts, and we also facilitate conversations among movement practitioners to strengthen and deepen the work of inter-cooperation.

### **3.11 hOurworld**

We are a worker owned co-op. We offer free access to software for timebanks across the country. We partner with local community timebanks and co-train with them. We hope to thread the time economy into the co-op economy!

### **3.12 Manitoba Cooperative Association**

MCA is a provincial association of cooperative organizations, created by its members to enhance and support the development of a united, growing and influential cooperative movement in Manitoba.

### **3.13 New Economics Institute**

We are building a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to the values of a cooperative economy, so that we can more effectively coordinate, collaborate, and grow this movement together. We are also actively organizing students and young people on University campuses across North America. Many of these young people are passionate about coops, and we work hard to connect them with the resources they need to get involved with cooperatives.

### **3.14 North American Students of Co-operation**

The NASCO family exists to organize and educate cooperatives — particularly common equity coops — and their members for the stated purpose of promoting a community-oriented cooperative movement.

### **3.15 Northwest Cooperative Development Center**

We foster community economic development through the cooperative business model.

### **3.16 Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Co-op Development Center**

We support numerous cooperative and related projects especially in rural areas of the Rocky Mountain West.

### **3.17 Sarapis Foundation**

Sarapis helps nonprofit, community and cooperative organizations use free, libre and open source tools and techniques to more effectively collaborate on open solutions to local challenges.

### **3.18 Solidarity NYC**

SolidarityNYC connects, supports, and promotes New York City’s solidarity economy by making pre-existing solidarity economics practices more visible. We achieve this through our various projects including our short films, interactive map, and research, all of which provide tangible examples of members/organizations that fall under the banner of the solidarity economy.

### **3.19 US Federation of Worker Co-ops**

Founded in 2004, we provide member services, consulting services, and public education to support worker cooperatives. See our website at [www.usworker.coop](http://www.usworker.coop) and our DAWN project at [www.dawn.coop](http://www.dawn.coop).

## Section 4

# The board and operations

The operations of the co-op are in transition. A Steering Committee worked over many years to bring the co-op into existence, and some members of that committee agreed to serve as the co-op's initial Board of Directors in the period between incorporation (July, 2012) and the first annual meeting (June, 2013). We are grateful to all members of the Steering Committee for their work in fostering the co-op. At the time of writing, the co-op's decision-making body is the following Board of Directors:

- ▷ Jamie Campbell (former Treasurer)
- ▷ Paul Fitzpatrick (Secretary, Tech Team member)
- ▷ Melissa Hoover (Membership Committee member)
- ▷ Jim Johnson (interim Treasurer, Tech Team member)
- ▷ Ethan Miller (President, Membership Committee member, Tech Team member)

The board has chosen to delegate certain responsibilities for the day-to-day activity of the co-op to an "Operations Team":

- ▷ Kathleen Fekete
- ▷ Paul Fitzpatrick
- ▷ Noémi Giszpenc
- ▷ Daphne Loring

Here is a more complete list of people involved in the running of the co-op and roles they play (or played):

### 4.1 Jamie Campbell

Director; former Treasurer; former Steering Committee member.

### 4.2 Andy Danforth

Assistant Treasurer; Incorporator.

### 4.3 Kathleen Fekete

Operations Team member; Incorporator.

#### 4.4 Paul Fitzpatrick

Director; Secretary; Operations Team member; former Steering Committee member; Tech Team member.

#### 4.5 Noémi Giszpenc

Operations Team member.

#### 4.6 Melissa Hoover

Director; Membership Committee member; former Steering Committee member.

#### 4.7 Jim Johnson

Director; interim Treasurer; former Steering Committee member; Tech Team member.

#### 4.8 Daphne Loring

Operations Team member.

#### 4.9 Ethan Miller

Director; President; Membership Committee member; former Steering Committee member; Tech Team member.

#### 4.10 Incorporators

The following people helped get the co-op incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:

- ▷ **Steve Backman.**
- ▷ **Andy Danforth.**
- ▷ **Kathleen Fekete.**
- ▷ **Micha Josephy.**
- ▷ **Ben Mauer.**
- ▷ **Brian van Slyke.**
- ▷ **Jeremiah Ward.**

Thank you all!

#### 4.11 Alumni

We're excited to already have some illustrious alumni:

- ▷ **Jennifer Caruso:** Former Operations Team member.
- ▷ **Neily Jennings:** Former Operations Team member; former Steering Committee member.
- ▷ **Joe Marraffino:** Former Director; former President; former Operations Team member.
- ▷ **Adam Schwartz:** Former Steering Committee member.

## 4.12 Other help

Far too many people have helped out in making the co-op a reality than we can reasonably name here, or in ways that do not fit the categories above. Here are some highlights:

- **Benjamin Bradley:** Benjamin contributed to the development of find.coop, while at Ronin Tech Collective and then GaiaHost Collective.
- **Jennifer Caruso:** Jennifer was instrumental in finding funding for the co-op's business development, while at the Cooperative Development Institute.
- **Josh Crawford:** Josh helped create an early prototype of find.coop, while at Brattleboro Tech Collective.
- **Patrick J. Deluhery:** Patrick took care of the legal aspects of the co-op's incorporation, and fine-tuning its bylaws.
- **Dave Evans:** Dave helped create an early prototype of find.coop, while at Brattleboro Tech Collective.
- **Jason Lemieux:** Jason contributed to the development of find.coop, while at Eggplant Active Media Workers Collective.
- **Ben Mauer:** Ben chipped in some much needed graphic design for find.coop, thanks Quilted!
- **Jason Mott:** Jason contributed to the development of find.coop, while at Brattleboro Tech Collective and then Ronin Tech Collective.
- **Charles Uchu Strader:** Charles provided hosting support for find.coop with GaiaHost Collective, long before the Data Commons could pay its way.

## Section 5

# Finances

### 5.1 Fiscal year 2012

The co-op incorporated in July, 2012. It has no debts. It accumulated US\$2,045 in member payments in fiscal year 2012<sup>1</sup>, with 8 members signed up in that period. It made no outlays. The co-op opened a bank account with the Greenfield Co-operative Bank (Greenfield, Massachusetts). The balance as of December 31, 2012 was:

Account type	Balance (US\$)
Current account	2035.00
Money market account	10.00

Since the co-op incorporated so recently, we'd like to go beyond the mandated report on its operations in fiscal year 2012, and look also at the finances that got it to the point of incorporation, and a provisional report on finances in 2013 to date.

### 5.2 Fiscal Transition from Project to Co-op

The Co-op was created through the work of the Data Commons Project. This project was cooked up on a grassy knoll at the 2005 Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy. In 2007, a code sprint led to a prototype for what would eventually become find.coop. In 2008, the Cooperative Development Institute took on fiscal sponsorship of the Data Commons Project. The project received grants from the Cooperative Charitable Trust, Equal Exchange, and some individuals. Code sprints continued. In 2010, the project was awarded an RBEG grant from the USDA for 2011, enabling part-time staff coordination and business development. In 2012, the Data Commons Co-op incorporated and opened for business.

The Data Commons Project received welcome donations from the following individuals:

- Margaret Bau
- Jennifer Caruso
- Rebecca Dunn
- Frank Lindenfeld

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<sup>1</sup>The co-op's fiscal year corresponds with the calendar year.

The following organizations also donated or gave grants to the Data Common Project, for which we thank them:

- **USDA Rural Development**: A USDA RBEG grant was instrumental to the development of the Data Commons as a (with luck) viable business.
- **Cooperative Charitable Trust**: We are very grateful to the CCT for its low-bureaucracy giving. Its grants were very helpful for sustaining momentum at key moments in the project's evolution.
- **Equal Exchange**
- **Community Pharmacy**
- **Cooperative Fund of New England**
- **Pedal Express**
- **Rainbow Grocery Cooperative**
- **South Mountain Company**

The Cooperative Development Institute holds US\$1,971 in donations on behalf of the Data Commons Project, and stands ready to provide these funds to the Co-op. These funds are not yet on the Co-op's books.

### 5.3 Fiscal year 2013

In 2013, at the time of writing (early May) the Co-op accumulated US\$421.88 in member payments, with another 7 members signing up (not all member dues have been processed at the time of writing). It paid out US\$821.27 in annual filing fees, taxes, and web hosting costs.

### 5.4 The ledger

The Co-op maintains a detailed ledger, available to any member upon request. We expect our simple bookkeeping to become more elaborate as our operations expand. We welcome bookkeeping advice from members, especially in this early phase as we establish systems.

### 5.5 Why so few outlays?

The operations of the co-op have been very conservative during this period. The rate at which it would attract members was critical to forming a budget, but that rate was difficult to estimate. It also seemed better to get a reasonable number of members on board and consult with them before committing to large projects.

## Section 6

# Projects

### 6.1 The “Stone Soup” family of directories

The co-op runs an online directory of organizations, at [find.coop](http://find.coop), [solidarityeconomy.org](http://solidarityeconomy.org), and perhaps other domains in future. The idea of this directory is for it to be a “Stone Soup” effort that brings together multiple databases from groups working on alternative economies under many names: the new economy, the cooperative economy, the solidarity economy, the social economy, and more.

#### Community Directories

The “Stone Soup” Directory is in fact a family of overlapping community directories, where what is in and out of the directory is defined by a community. There is no need for communities to agree with each other in whole or in part. Here are some example community directories:

- ▷ [maine.find.coop](http://maine.find.coop), covering co-ops in Maine. Listings here draw on the Stronger Together directory maintained by Cooperative Maine.
- ▷ [canadianworker.find.coop](http://canadianworker.find.coop), covering worker cooperatives in Canada, drawing on listings provided by the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation.
- ▷ [usworker.find.coop](http://usworker.find.coop), covering worker cooperatives in the U.S., drawing on listings provided by the US Federation of Worker Co-ops.
- ▷ [solidarityeconomy.org](http://solidarityeconomy.org), covering the solidarity economy in North America.

These individual directories all draw on the same database, but are free to carve it up in different ways. For example, a worker cooperative in Maine will appear in [maine.find.coop](http://maine.find.coop) and [usworker.find.coop](http://usworker.find.coop), but each directory contains much that isn’t in the other.

#### Benefits

Investments in developing the [find.coop](http://find.coop) site pay off for every community making use of it. Feature development funded by any one community may benefit all others. Maintenance and hosting of the directory are backed by the co-op.



*The “Stone Soup” Directory began as [find.coop](http://find.coop), and is growing to serve several overlapping but distinct communities.*



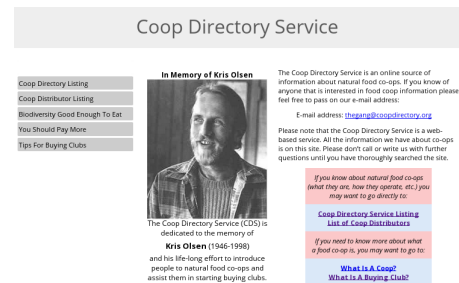
## Drawbacks

Pooling data in a common directory can slow things down due to the difficulty of merging overlapping data. Central to the co-op’s mission is a commitment to reducing that cost through technological and cultural means. In the short-term, running directories from separate databases is one way to get a directory up in a hurry without worrying about merges.

## 6.2 Rescuing coopdirectory.org

From 1999 through 2011, the Cooperating Directory Service, a Minnesota non-profit initially funded from the estate of Kris Olsen, operated a directory of natural food co-ops at [coopdirectory.org](http://coopdirectory.org). When the CDS non-profit closed in 2011, Stuart Reid of the Food Co-op Initiative was asked to take it on. He, in turn, checked in with the nascent Data Commons (of which the Food Co-op Initiative is a founding member) to see what it could do to help. There was no budget for working on this, and no natural “champion” to work on fund-raising. A Data Commons volunteer did some basic triage on the site. The first step was to save submissions and corrections made via the site from falling into a black hole, and start queuing them for processing. The next step was to rework the site, not for aesthetic purposes but simply for maintainability, using the minimally disruptive technological solution given the existing hosting. During this work, the [Coopy Toolbox](#) (developed by the cooperative) and the [scraperwiki library](#) helped a lot to systematize the existing directory data.

At the end of triaging, the website was living again, with new listings being added, changes of addresses being applied, and so on. The directory listings are stored in a simple online spreadsheet. Changes made to that spreadsheet propagate to the website without the need for web development knowledge.



The [coopdirectory.org](http://coopdirectory.org) site lists natural food co-ops throughout the US, and is dedicated to the memory of Kris Olsen.

“When Food Co-op Initiative took over administration of the Co-op Directory Service, we inherited a web site and database that had seen little maintenance in years. Paul Fitzpatrick [DCC volunteer] took up the challenge and in a short time had cleaned up the existing site, formatted the database, and instituted a new, streamlined data collection process. He has been very responsive to our vision of the directory and has anticipated and addressed issues that we could not have managed in-house.”

— Stuart Reid, Food Co-op Initiative

## 6.3 The Coopy toolbox: diffing, patching, and merging data

The Data Commons Co-op has a vision of communities collaborating and sharing knowledge about their overlapping economies. There are many obstacles to making such a vision work, some cultural, some technical. Coopy is a toolbox (developed by DCC) designed to make a revolutionary workflow used by programmers also usable for data projects.

Large collaborative software projects are now a commonplace. When collaborating, each programmer has their own copy of the project, which they edit as they see fit. Tools exist for quickly comparing versions, cherry-picking desirable improvements, and merging them with other changes. Here are key advances that have made software collaboration more pleasant over the years:

- ▷ **Diffing and patching.** An early tool called “diff” compared a modified version of some software with an original version, producing a description of that difference in a neutral format. That difference could be sent to others (including the person who made the original version) and integrated with their versions with a “patch” tool. Crucially, this worked even for versions that had diverged from the original version, allowing changes made in parallel to be merged.
- ▷ **Revision control.** Diffing and patching works best when the most recent common ancestor of two versions is known. A tool called a revision control system was developed to make that piece of bureaucracy a breeze. Early systems were centralized, and so were only usable within a tightly-knit team, with diffing and patching remaining the standard for “outsiders” contributing to a project. Eventually, though, people figured out how to make *distributed* revision control systems, finally allowing peer-to-peer collaboration *and* great version tracking, which led to a revolution sometimes called “social coding.”

How great would it be to be able to grab a copy of a public spreadsheet (e.g. a list of co-ops in a state), make some edits, then quickly suggest those changes to the original maintainer of the list? And then for that maintainer to be able to quickly review those changes, cherry-pick what they want, and merge them with their version despite it having changed in the meantime?

That is the vision of the Coopy Toolbox. Some individual spreadsheet or database programs support methods of comparing versions of their native file format, but there’s no reliable way to pass those “diffs” on to someone else. Likewise with revision control – such support as exists is balkanized. Coopy fills in the missing pieces. It implements a “diff” and “patch” command for a wide variety of spreadsheet and database formats. It can also work with existing distributed revision control systems for true peer-to-peer data collaboration. You can get a sense for how this works at [share.find.coop](http://share.find.coop). We are also developing a site called [growrows.com](http://growrows.com) to translate all this into a novel way to collaborate on data projects. As a very basic example, imagine the following scenario:

ORGANIZATION	STREET	CITY	STATE	COUNTRY
Godzilla Wrestlers	15 Danger Lane	NYC	NY	USA
Data Commons Co-op	21 Goodnow Road	Shelburne Falls	MA	USA
Space Monkeys Anonymous	7 Primate Crescent	Towrongto	ON	CA

Imagine this is the “master” list of some directory.

ORGANIZATION	STREET	CITY	STATE	COUNTRY
Data Commons Co-op	21 Goodnow Road	Shelburne Falls	MA	USA
Space Monkeys Anonymous	7 Primate Crescent	Toronto	ON	CA
Board of Directors Co-op	88 Wishful Street	Portland	ME	USA

A helpful volunteer takes the list and brings it up to date. But what changed?

@@	ORGANIZATION	STREET	CITY	STATE	COUNTRY
---	Godzilla Wrestlers	15 Danger Lane	NYC	NY	USA
	Data Commons Co-op	21 Goodnow Road	Shelburne Falls	MA	USA
→	Space Monkeys Anonymous	7 Primate Crescent	Towrongto→Toronto	ON	CA
+++	Board of Directors Co-op	88 Wishful Street	Portland	ME	USA

This is the “diff” that Coopy would report, in a format developed by the co-op to be both instantly readable, and usable as a “patch” format for applying changes. See [share.find.coop](http://share.find.coop), [growrows.com](http://growrows.com),

or <http://paulfitz.github.io/coopyhx/> to see the format in action and try it out in more complex situations.

## 6.4 Other ongoing projects of the Data Commons Cooperative

- ▷ Embeddable maps – done, but not documented.
- ▷ Marketplace for trade.
- ▷ Cross-member email opt-in.

## Section 7

# Proposed Capital Plan for 2014

*(To be ratified by the membership at the AGM June 14, 2013.)*

- ▷ Members of the Data Commons Cooperative will make annual capital payments that will go into individual member accounts. The DCC will not pay interest on members' capital accounts and does not plan to return capital contributions upon a member leaving the cooperative. The individual member capital accounts will only be paid out in the event that the cooperative dissolves and remaining assets are distributed in accordance with the bylaws.
- ▷ If a member contributes more than the required payment, then the excess balance will go into an unallocated liability account.
- ▷ For members that receive a payment waiver, then the cooperative will transfer \$1 from the unallocated liability account to the member's individual capital account to subsidize purchase of a share in the co-op.

## Section 8

# Draft FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

This is an unpolished, incomplete, and not entirely self-consistent set of answers to frequently asked questions we've been encountering. Our own thinking on several of the topics addressed has been evolving based on experience. Such is the nature of an innovative and young cooperative! We include this FAQ here since the answers may be helpful to you and the questions have certainly been helpful for us.

### 8.1 About the co-op

#### **What kind of a co-op is the Data Commons Cooperative?**

It is similar to a consumer co-op, or a shared services co-op. The co-op is owned by members who receive the co-op's services.

#### **Who does the work?**

The co-op currently has no staff. Right now, administrative work is done by a mixture of volunteer labor and co-op developers. Board members have been chipping in time. Software development has been done by volunteers and individuals from tech collectives on "10% time."

### 8.2 Membership

#### **How do we become a member of the Data Commons Cooperative?**

Groups and individuals apply to the Data Commons Cooperative by filling out a simple [application](#). The Membership Committee will then review your application looking for aligned mission and values.

#### **We're not a co-op; can we join?**

By all means! While the Data Commons includes cooperatives, its scope is much more expansive. The Data Commons Cooperative brings together diverse entities in the "ethical," solidarity, cooperative, new, and social economies. This may include, but is not limited to, community gardens, credit unions, worker-cooperatives, community land trusts, time-dollar banks, etc.

**What is expected of members?**

Members must demonstrate a commitment to the movement for a just and democratic economy. They are expected to maintain a data set that furthers the goals of the movement, pursue the clear licensing of their data set for legal, effective, and secure sharing; select an individual to act as a contact person to the cooperative and contribute annual dues.

**8.3 Dues****How much does it cost?**

Annual member dues are currently set at 0.1% of a member's previous year's budgeted expenses, rounded down to the nearest \$50 with a minimum threshold of \$100. The DCC is committed to being accessible to all organizations, regardless of financial capacity. Any group may apply for a dues waiver. Waiver requests will be reviewed at the same time as the membership application.

**Pass-through monies amount to a significant portion of our budget; how do we account for this in the membership formula?**

The dues formula is based on your operating budget. We leave the interpretation of your budget to you.

**What if we cannot afford membership dues?**

The Data Commons does not want membership fees to be a barrier to membership. Waivers are available to organizations with limited finances. To request a waiver, fill out the "Request for Waiver" section on the membership application form. By the same token, organizations with sufficient resources can (and often do) choose to pay a greater amount to contribute to covering the costs of members with waivers.

**8.4 Sharing data****Our data is not public; we do not have the authority to share it**

The DCC does not want you to share any data you are not authorized to share. We have set up tiers of sharing to help ensure that you can share at a level that is legal and appropriate.

**What are the levels of sharing and what do they mean?**

The minimal level of sharing is "eyes-only," where you allow other co-op members to view your data, without granting them any rights to use it. This at least makes the data visible, and members can then come to their own arrangements about usage if they wish.

At the other end of the sharing spectrum is an "open data" license or waiver such as the [ODbL](#) or [CC0](#). The co-op's goal is to get as much data as possible moving in this direction. But we perfectly understand that there are often very good reasons to limit distribution of databases that include information about people and organizations.

Current practice is to start with "eyes-only" sharing, since it is simple to understand, and is enough to get the ball rolling.

**Our organization has invested time and money into our existing database and we hesitate to just give it away.**

The DCC is founded on the principle that we all ultimately benefit through sharing. We encourage members to join the DCC with a spirit of sharing and to loosen their notions of proprietary information. When we share, the time and money that we have invested gets put to work for others, whose investments of time and money can also benefit us. That said, every member chooses what data they contribute. It is totally acceptable if there are specific data sets that they choose not to share or that require privacy.

**We do not want personal information of members or contacts distributed. We do not want to share our mailing list.**

That's fine. No problem. When you join the DCC, YOU choose *what* information you share and *who* you share it with. For example, you can choose to share organizational contacts, but not a mailing list of individuals. Then, YOU choose whether this information is available exclusively to other members of the DCC or to the general public.

**Can we share some of our data and not others?**

Yes, members choose what data to share and with whom.

**What will keep our data from being misused?**

This is mainly a concern with “open data” licenses. And in fact, once your data is being shared publicly, with a license that allows a broad range of uses, there is no guarantee that it will not be used for purposes you would disapprove of. We believe that the positive uses to which shared data can be put, however, far outweigh the potential negative uses; and that evildoers will generally not be stopped by lack of licensing anyway.

**What is the difference between displaying our data publicly on our website and sharing through the Data Commons?**

If your data is already on your website, with an open license attached to it, then you've been a great citizen already. Sharing via the Data Commons could allow you to share *less* publicly (but we don't want you to do that! – just listing differences). Joining the co-op would help fund work that will give your data a greater impact, by getting it to more of the people who need it. And you'd have a say in making that happen.

**Our database is a mess. Do we need to share it right away?**

No :-)

**Do we even have the right to share our database?**

Good question. Quite possibly not. And even if you have the legal right, it may be very impolite. Getting to the point where there is data to share is part of the work of the co-op.

## 8.5 And more

### **We already have a directory/map. Why would we need the Data Commons?**

The purpose of the Data Commons Cooperative is to make it easier for members to maintain the data that they have up to date, and to share the costs and effort of further data gathering and maintenance. Many groups invest in building a directory or map, only to have the data behind such efforts become obsolete. Membership will allow you to receive timely updates of new data coming from other members, in reciprocity for the new updates that you provide. As a member you can also influence the future direction of development of the cooperative, meaning that tools for gathering, maintaining, displaying and deploying the data will be created for your benefit and the benefit of other members. A secondary benefit of the DCC is raising the profile of all types of cooperative/solidarity enterprises and impressing the public with the wide panoply of possible alternatives.

### **Isn't NCBA already doing this? I have seen CooperateUSA.coop**

[CooperateUSA.coop](#) is a great directory of cooperatives in the USA, put together in 2012 by the National Cooperative Business Association. There are several differences between CooperateUSA and the DCC. The Data Commons Cooperative is first about serving members, and only secondarily about displaying the data contributed by members. Entities listed in the Data Commons Cooperative online display, [find.coop](#), include cooperatives as well as many other types of organizations, such as time banks, co-working spaces, democratic ESOPs (a form of employee-ownership), and co-op developers, and are located in the USA *and* other countries. NCBA is considering joining the DCC as a means of maintaining the quality of its data. The DCC would provide the NCBA, as any member, with a platform for exchanging data with groups in various sectors and geographies.

### **We want our directory/map to be the “go-to” destination for X. Will DCC direct attention away from our initiative?**

So as not to upstage any member, the DCC will serve more as a conduit toward the richer displays of our members than as a final destination for users. While members may want to highlight the unique characteristics of their particular section of the cooperative/solidarity economy, the DCC will celebrate the wealth of diversity to be found.

### **We have limited capacity. Will membership add to our workload?**

One of the goals of the Data Commons is to contribute to the data and data management of our members. The goal is to share information, knowledge and resources, such that all members benefit and ultimately add capacity to their respective initiatives.

### **Our data is already public, why would we join?**

A great value of the DCC is that it aggregates data and makes it more usable than a mass of unconnected data. Think about the added value in a phone book: the publishers compile and alphabetically arrange already public phone numbers changing that data from a pool of names and numbers into a usable directory. In addition, the Data Commons sees your membership and participation in the commons as more than your data contribution. In becoming a member, you then benefit from accessing the data of other members, enhanced tools and displays developed by the DCC, and sharing in the development of movement infrastructure.



**Why is the Data Commons needed?**

We are in the middle of a great renaissance of “alternative” economic initiatives: In communities large and small, around the country and throughout the world, there is an explosion of projects, networks, programs, enterprises based in values of cooperation, justice, democracy, and ecological stewardship. Often these initiatives are emerging in relative isolation from one another, or at the least fractured by sector, geography, or organizational form. These initiatives need to be made more *visible* and *connected* to one another in webs of mutual support. Making these connections, we not only add capacity and efficacy to individual initiatives, but we give form to the new economy, build this new economy by connecting production, exchange, consumption, investment, and collaborative development. *The Data Commons provides the organizational and technological infrastructure for making these critical connections.* Here are some more specific needs the DCC will address:

The Data Commons will provide members with access to good, relevant, up to date data. It will provide a collaborative system for keeping the data relevant, sharing and disseminating to the public when warranted. It will save us all money by reducing the costs of collecting, maintaining and disseminating data as individual entities. It will provide the organizational structure and technical expertise to develop shared tech tools into the future.