Working Meeting August 9th 2017

The Board determined the following discussion items for the Working Meeting, which was agreed to take place on Wednesday, August 9th, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. at La Reunion:

* Check-in
* Membership Survey Results
* Discussion on increasing racial diversity in Austin cooperative community
* CTAP Partnership with ROC-USA
* Board officer description bylaw amendments
* Working meeting sunset review
* D&O Insurance and Worker’s Comp

*In Attendance:*

Natalie San Luis - Staff

Joshua Sabik - Chair

Gatlin Johnson - Treasurer

Indya Flanagan - Secretary

**Membership Survey Results**

* About 50% of the membership responded
* One of the most important things was reported household income, important for grants and affordable housing
* Typical CHEA member is below 30% of median household income for Travis county
* Values that housemates feel most strongly about are affordable housing, democratic member control, autonomy, and independence
* Natalie would like to use the info from the survey to start brainstorming mission statements, crucial if we were to apply for grants
* Most respondents think CHEA should prioritize expanding

Feedback from those attending Board meeting:

* La Reunion may be in need of beautification - have been diverting resources to making things work rather than look nice, perhaps can beautify in the coming years since have fixed major structural issues
* Indya to send out membership report to both houses (side note, Indya will start sending out Natalie’s staff reports to both houses when she sends out minutes)
* Interesting that there’s an omission of 50% of the members, try to get people across different levels of technological literacy to fill it in, perhaps at the general membership meeting, reduce friction

**Discussion on increasing racial diversity in Austin co op community**

* Community rep not present, perhaps we should wait until she is available to discuss this agenda item
* Natalie has been on ICC board as house rep, this is a problem they are trying to work through as well, discussion around outreach, education, scholarships, and support given to people who live in houses who have marginalized identities
* Would be cool to have a broader Austin round table re: this
* College houses may be interested in discussion too, have seen a dip in membership
* There have been groups in town interested in creating a black co operative house, perhaps CHEA can help lend support to them (Black Sovereign Nation, Undoing White Supremacy Austin)
* Caritas and the other non profit service help find housing for people in need, leverage that relationship for CHEA and other Austin co ops to help provide affordable housing
* Hannah Frankel has worked in social services for a while, there are 4 nonprofit partner programs right now, enthusiastic responses from case workers of these non profit re: manageable deposit, no credit/background check, social aspect; helps communicate non profit nature to the city
* Currently we have 2 section 8 residents and 2 referred by partner programs ( La Reunion)
* First impressions matter, friendliness matters! Importance magnified with those referred by partner programs who don’t have a background with co ops
* Historically speaking have had a harder time getting residents involved in the community if they don’t have co op experience
* Perhaps welcoming new members more enthusiastically would help
* Have heard criticisms re: rules feel arbitrary and convoluted, not very well documented -

**CTAP Partnership with ROC USA**

* Natalie’s fears re: the feasibility of CTAP Partnership were confirmed by the network affiliate she spoke with
* That network affiliate knows of no partnership that is breaking even, very expensive and time consuming
* We could do it, but would have to have much more than a part time employee on task
* Concerns over ability of ROC USA to work with low income communities of color because they are a large org that serves as a bank in some ways (located in New Hampshire, mostly white)
* Network affiliates have to work hard to bump up the percentage of closing fees, they max out loans at 110% which is often not enough to cover all expenses
* A good strategy for building co operatives for the people who need them the most and have the least access, but the only org (ROC USA) is very difficult to work with and not representative of the people that they serve; the work is not financially sustainable
* He pointed Natalie in the direction of another network affiliate in Utah
* Alongside these conversations, Natalie has been looking into grants and funding; she has found some foundations we should apply for funding from
* She will continue talking with Andy from Basta - even if we can’t do the work laid out by ROC USA we can still assist with whatever Basta is doing and help ARNL
* In ROC USA’s business plan, they have the network affiliates running a deficit for at least 3 years
* CHEA could not do this work if we thought we would be losing money from it because there are already concerns with money
* NASCO was not a good fit to be a CTAP partnership as determined by ROC USA, probably because they are not local
* Perhaps Nasco Properties could help CHEA do this, if they want to do the property buying but be hands off re: democratic model
* Costs: according to the network affiliate Natalie spoke with, it costs $50,000 to do a deal from start to finish
* Grants: how feasible are they? Specific program would be assisting mobile home communities transitioning into resident owned communities, money we ask for would be primarily for staff time
* Timeline: Natalie will start applying for grants when she returns from vacation next week
* Just for ARNL, we might be able to do it with one staff member (full time), but if our intention is to continue doing this work we would need to ramp up - NP could possibly help with this
* Bottom Line: if we can get the money to do this then we have nothing to lose, it depends on if we can get grants and other support
* In a nutshell: ROC USA would finance the sale, but not the process of us becoming a CTAP. For ARNL, they would pay ROC USA like CHEA pays NASCO

**Board officer description bylaw amendments**

* Gatlin has been working on this (https://chea.coop/@Bylaws)

**Working meeting sunset review**

* We have been doing this structure (working meetings and then voting meetings)
* Josh feels that we are doing the same meetings twice, one without voting and technically without minutes though we do take minutes anyways
* May want to abolish working meetings, and have regular voting meetings each time instead
* Or, try two radically different flavors of meetings and explore what the working meeting could be

**D&O Insurance and Worker’s Comp**

* Indya has had a hard time doing this, Corey suggested reaching out to Daniel Miller (great idea Corey!)
* Daniel responded saying that he will put us in touch with the broker that NASCO uses for D&O insurance; they pay about $2,000 per year for coverage, so ours would probably be less than that
* The feeling is that using a broker that NASCO uses and trusts would be fine and reduce time spent getting various quotes from here and there
* Still need to find ideas for worker’s comp

Next Time’s Agenda:

The Board determined the following discussion items for the Voting Meeting, which was agreed to take place on Wednesday, August 23rd, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. at La Reunion.

* Check-In
* Staff Report
* CTAP Partnership with ROC-USA
* Board officer description bylaw amendments
* Working meeting sunset review
* D&O Insurance and Worker’s Comp
* Brainstorming around mission statement
* Web domain registration and hosting
* ACBA Bylaws vote
* CHEA-House communication channel strategy
* CBAR services

Natalie’s Staff Report: August 9th, 2017

Hi all,

Here's my staff report. All of the major stuff I've been working on is already part of the agenda, aside from grants/funding (which is kind of part of the ROC USA/CTAP agenda item) and the NP Rep election. See y'all at La Reunion tonight!

* ROC USA/CTAP
  + I set up calls with some technical assistance providers in the ROC USA Network. Unfortunately a lot of the information I received was pretty discouraging. The most illuminating call was with Warren Kramer of Northwest Country Foundation, which has seven staff members. They have completed 10 conversions of manufactured home communities to resident-owned communities. Some highlights from our conversation:
    - The good:
      * He remembered the certification process as being “not super onerous.”
      * He said the work was “totally amazing and transformational.”
      * In his experience, one of the most difficult hurdles is attempting to get owners to sell, which shouldn’t be an issue for ARNL.
    - Challenges:
      * This work is very expensive and time-consuming. Originally, we thought that technical assistance could be a revenue stream that might support further expansion. However, according to Warren: “I don’t know that anybody in the network has broken even on this. It costs us about $50k to do a deal from start to finish.” This is corroborated by the ROC USA business plan, which estimates new CTAPs running a deficit for the first three years of work.
      * Warren said ROC USA was unwilling to adapt to challenges that the network affiliates experience. For example, they only loan 110% the purchase price, which is often not enough to cover infrastructure or deferred maintenance. ROC USA seems very disconnected from the organizing work on the ground and isn’t very helpful in adapting to the challenges of working with low-income communities of color.
      * Only one network affiliate has a staff of one, and they have only been able to complete one purchase. I’m trying to set up a call with that affiliate.
  + Takeaways:
    - I have significant concerns about the financial viability of ROC USA’s model and the level of support they provide to network affiliates. We have a leg up because ARNL is already organized, but even if we found the funding for a full-time position and certification, we might still end up losing money.
    - Next steps: Continue grant work and talk to ROC USA about our concerns. I am also reaching out to Andy from Basta Austin to see if there are other ways we can support ARNL in the meantime.
* Membership report
  + We can go over the report in more detail at the meeting. The report will help us in the future if we apply for grants/funding and need to report members’ median income.
  + We should use the feedback to draft mission statements.
* Funding/grants
  + Continued research on grant funding through the Regional Foundation Library. I have identified five funders who might be interested in our work:
    - Meadows Foundation (Dallas): Funds nonprofits that “address basic human needs” and “improve quality and circumstances of life” by, among other things, “promoting understanding and cooperation among people.”
    - The Cooperative Foundation: Cooperative development, research, and education
    - Ralph K. Morris Foundation: Funding for cooperative training
    - Caterpillar Foundation: Generic corporate foundation but it has funded cooperatives in the past
    - JP Morgan Chase: Same as above

I’m going to start putting together applications when I get back from vacation. Assistance from members is welcome and appreciated!

* + Applied to the Geeks Who Drink Trivia For A Cause program. We wouldn’t really have to do anything but select a trivia night; proceeds would go to us for that night. The employee who emailed me back had some questions about whether we qualified but I haven’t heard back from her since I replied.
  + I’m also looking into an alumni tracking system/newsletter with donate link and Amazon affiliate link.
* NASCO Properties Rep election
  + I made the ballot with two candidates (Samuel Bean and Chris Baker) and their candidate statements. I realized, however, that the voters (and their email addresses) will be different from the last election. Will the trustees have updated member contact info? I can also make print ballots for members who don’t want to vote via email.
* Legal clinic
  + We have been approved for continued work with the UT Community Development Clinic. If we want to continue working with them, I can sign the agreement and send it back.
  + Any updates or next steps on the Fair Housing complaint, the member services committee, or the fair housing training?
* Etc.
  + I’ll be out on vacation from Sunday to Thursday. I’ll probably do a little work while I’m away but I might not be prompt when responding to emails #beachlyfe
  + Still trying to figure out a good digital storage system. Maybe this should be part of the (potentially upcoming) technology audit?