

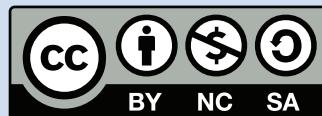
COLLECTING OURSELVES



A Cooperative
Entrepreneurship Curriculum

COLLECTING OURSELVES: A COOPERATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM

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Authored for the Kris Olsen Traveling Cooperative Institute program of Northcountry Cooperative Foundation by Emily M Lippold Cheney in 2015-2016

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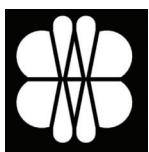
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It is due to the support of Northcountry Cooperative Foundation's leadership and had faith in the vision to take the TCI program in a new direction that led to the authoring of this curriculum. TCI's namesake, Kris Olsen, deserves appreciation for his years of driving a truck around the region helping to build our regional cooperative movement and inspiring this work.

Both the US Department of Agriculture and the CHS Foundation provided considerable financial support. Without that provided funding, the scope and scale of such a program would have been impossible.



Committed to the future of rural communities.



A resounding thank you is extended to all those past and current members of the #coopyouth movement, for whom this curriculum was initially designed. The creativity and persistence of the #coopyouth movement maintain the broader cooperative movement's imagination and bring to life the positive feelings of liberation and peace towards which we are working.

This curriculum is dedicated to all people working for racial justice in the US. During some of the TCI trainings, participants discussed the role cooperatives can play in struggles for justice, as well as how some cooperatives that have not held to their Principles and Values have contributed to injustice. In line with this, this dedication is also a commitment to using cooperative entrepreneurship to build an intersectional cooperative movement. #blacklivesmatter

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR



June 2015
Minneapolis, Minnesota

When I first envisioned this curriculum, it was my intention to create a resource to guide young people, with any level of cooperative experience, to begin work in the cooperative movement. I pictured young people educating themselves in the “why” of cooperative entrepreneurship and, following, empowering themselves with the “how.” At the time I chose to develop this curriculum, cooperative entrepreneurship resources were piecemeal and scattered across formats and organizations – or, they were only accessible in a comprehensive way to closed groups. Creating this resource took two years of work that strengthened my understanding of the philosophy and practice of cooperative entrepreneurship, the nature and importance of peer learning, and the monstrous task of turning a set of workshops into a cohesive curriculum.

Midway through the first draft, I went on the road in the Upper Midwest to facilitate trainings using the methods and materials I had curated and created. As part of my methodology, I spent many daylight hours biking through rural towns, talking to people, and visiting local stores, libraries, and museums. I would often sleep in the backseat of my car and wake up to a beautiful landscape – next to an expansive lake in the Dakotas or in the lush Wisconsin northwoods. I saw and learned so much about the region I call home – particularly about the beauty, history, and importance of collective work in Upper Midwestern communities.

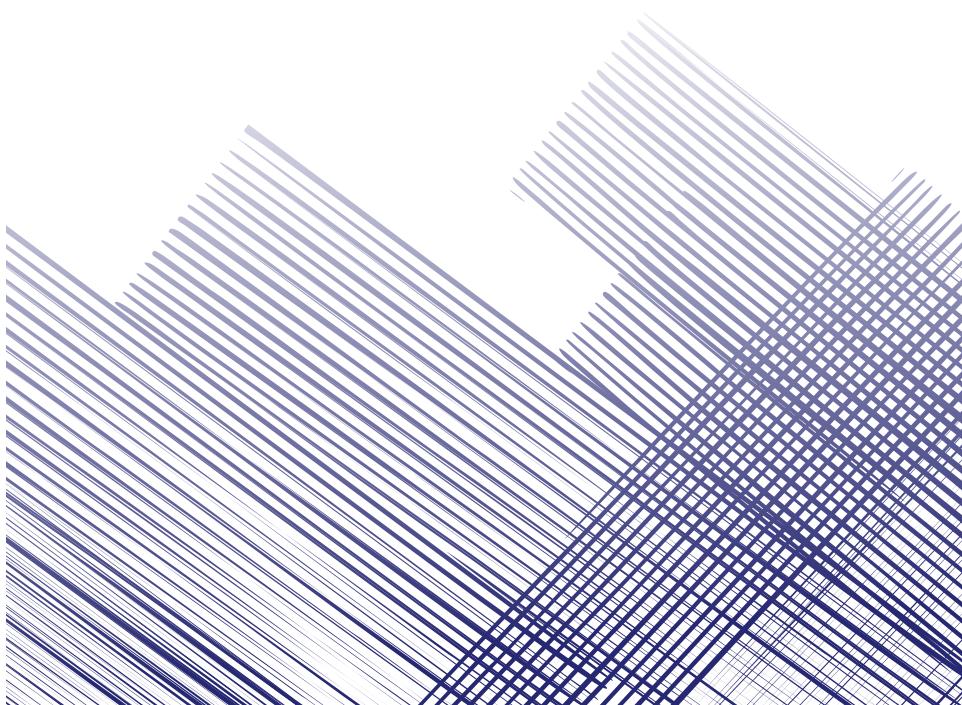
I discovered much complexity in my region’s history of collective action. While in North Dakota, I heard both high praise for and strong resistance to the booming extractive industry in the Bakken Fields. I witnessed the aftermath of resource colonization throughout the Upper Peninsula, which led to the deepening of my understanding of the work the Dakota, Ojibwa, and other Native communities have been doing for centuries to steward these lands. I visited some of the remaining vestiges of the cooperative retail and distribution system built a century ago by Finnish settlers. I also stopped in towns with newer “natural foods” cooperatives and heard residents complain about the store’s prices and culture with comments such as, “That store is not for me.” One general manager of an old Finnish

cooperative told me, "We're a cooperative because we're owned by the community, not because we sell fancy food."

When reflecting on what I witnessed and learned, it has become increasingly clear to me that the complex context in which we do the work of building cooperative enterprises cannot be ignored. My sincere hope for this resource is that it can serve as a tool to support people in efforts to not simply pursue cooperative entrepreneurship, but to do so in a way that contributes to halting patterns of harm in their lives and communities. We are not just creating things with our friends; we are responding to and resisting models and cultures of organization that perpetuate injustice and hurt. Building cooperative businesses, if done with this both grand and fundamental intention, can be a way to contribute to necessary healing and the building of a better world.



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LICENSING

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This licensing choice was made in service to the task of building a commons of cooperative development education resources.

The best edits made to this curriculum came out of feedback received from those who used it as trainers and trainees. Any feedback from future trainers and trainees will help to continue to evolve and improve this resource. If you would like to share your edits for inclusion in future iterations of this curriculum, please get in touch with the author via email: emily@northcountryfoundation.org.

For suggestions on how to adapt and improve this work for your unique audience and needs, review "Using the Curriculum: Adaptations."

HISTORY & METHOD

CURRICULUM HISTORY

The enclosed curriculum and accompanying materials were developed between 2014 and 2016 as part of an iteration of the Kris Olsen Traveling Cooperative Institute (TCI) program that focused on reaching young people residing in rural areas of the Upper Midwest. The TCI program is an offering of the Northcountry Cooperative Foundation (NCF), which has been providing cooperative development and education through a seven state region since 1997. The curriculum's authoring was supported by many members of the cooperative development and education communities whose contributions ranged from direct collaboration to consultation. The curriculum was introduced on the training circuit in July of 2014, with each training session over the subsequent eighteen months dedicating a portion of time to evaluation of the program by its participants. In response to the collected feedback, the curriculum was revised and improved several times before publication of the current version.



A group of trainees in Northfield, Minnesota during 2015

EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY

To effectively use this curriculum as an educator, it is important to have an understanding of the basic philosophy and practice of Popular Education. The term 'Popular Education' comes from Latin America, where the word "popular" refers to "the people" - and, more specifically, the poor, working class, and/or landless. "Educação Popular" is "education of and by the people." There are forms of popular or "folk" education in cultures throughout the world. The term Popular Education is used to broadly refer to these styles and instances in the Americas because the

word was brought to prominence by Paulo Freire. The following is a way that a US-based group describes the concept:

- "Popular Education is a learning process which:**
- « **Is inclusive and accessible to people with a variety of education levels;**
 - « **Addresses the issues people face in their communities;**
 - « **Moves people toward a place of action;**
 - « **Develops new grassroots leadership.**
 - « **Is based on the lived experience of those participating in the learning;**
 - « **Incorporates non-traditional methods of learning – such as poetry, music or visual arts."**

[definition by Project South]

This education model starkly contrasts with most "conventional" forms of education, which are largely models in which the educator is the only "expert" in the room with the responsibility of imparting knowledge to the "ignorant" students. This model values memorization of information, retention, and repetition more than intellectual engagement, critical thinking, and the generation of new ideas.

Honoring the contributions and participation of every individual is inherent both in Popular Education and cooperation. Cooperatives are built on the principle that we each always bring something to the table and, as a result, deserve a voice in decision-making. In many ways, Popular Education is the embodiment of the cooperative principles and values in an educational model.

PRACTICING POPULAR EDUCATION

Putting philosophy into practice can be challenging. The following are some tips and tactics to help ensure an open and democratic education exchange in your trainings:

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP:

- « **Learn as much as you can about the participants.** What do they care about? What are their lives like? How can you connect the topics of the workshops to issues that matter to them?
- « **Reflect on Accessibility.** In thinking about your participants - their identities and experiences - there are several adaptations you can make to the content of your training, its timing and location, use of

visuals or audio, etc. *Check out the Accessibility Checklist in the Appendix for more specifics.*

AS THEY ARRIVE:

- ◀ **Be sure to welcome and acclimate folks as they arrive.** This explicit and personal welcome is a meaningful initial step in creating a comfortable and open culture of communication.
- ◀ Participants may continue to arrive during the first 10 - 15 minutes of the workshop. **Welcome and acclimate these folks, too**, but do so in a way that minimally impacts the “flow” of the workshop and conversation (e.g. getting them settled and sharing you’ll check in with them individually about anything they missed, if need be).

AS YOU BEGIN:

- ◀ Refer to “Welcome & Introduction” for tips on how to begin new workshops, lead introductions, and **set a conversational tone conducive to peer-learning.**
- ◀ **Continually frame and orient to time, objectives, and/or activities.** This helps people stay focused, appropriate energy, and plan for their needs (e.g. bathroom, phone call), etc. *That said, just because you will use these frames to orient people in the learning process, don't get hemmed in by them.* You change course to pursue deeper learning, and use these same tools to reorient to the new path.

WHEN LEADING MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES:

- ◀ **Be aware of different abilities.** Since some activities involve standing and movement, which may not be comfortable or possible for some, assure participants that they can remain in one place or provide another option.
- ◀ When giving instructions for activities with movement, **explicitly mention how the group should engage** with both seated/immobile and mobile folks.

WHEN PRESENTING INFORMATION:

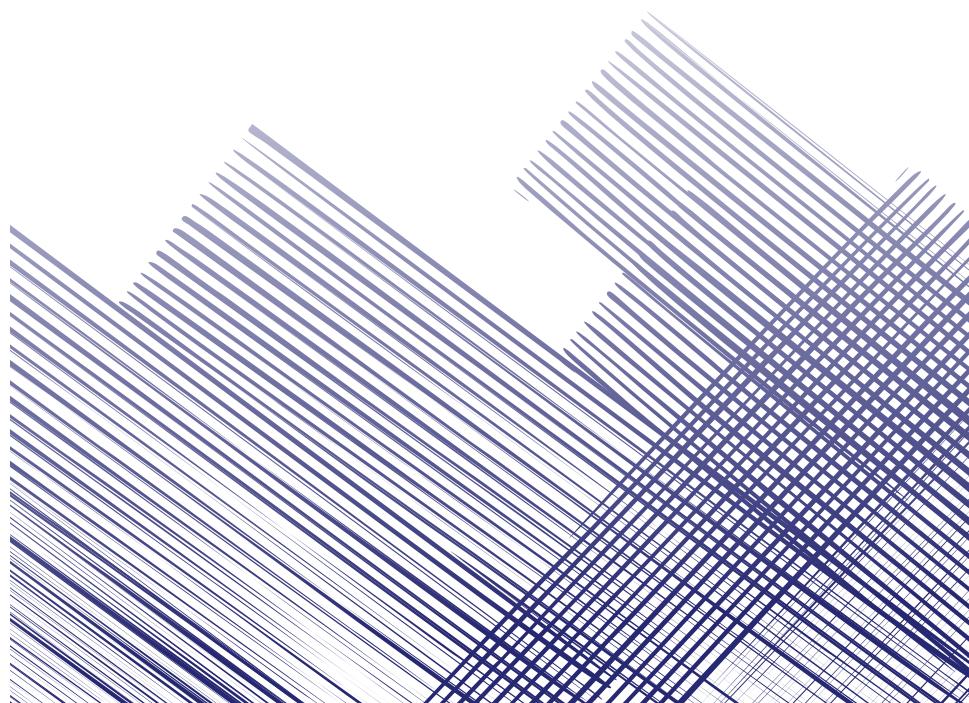
- ◀ For sections of the curriculum that utilize a presentation format, it is important to **frequently ask the group for their reflections or questions.**
 - » The central reason for interspersing questions is to allow you to build on the existing knowledge and expertise in the room.
 - » When you think attention is drifting, something seems to need clarification, or you feel like you've been talking for a bit too long - questions can be just what you need.

- ◀ **Don't hesitate to check-in about energy and attention very explicitly**
- the group will know if it needs to take a break.
- ◀ **Ask permission before ending a conversational exchange.** Sharing control in this way, facilitates a shared conversation between the educator and participants.

AT THE END:

- ◀ **Ask participants for feedback** at the end of each session. Adjust your next facilitation to respond to their feedback, which will both reassure them of the value of their evaluations, as well as expand and strengthen your facilitation skills.

In summary, much of popular education philosophy and practices focus on ensuring the content and format is accessible to learning styles, physical capacities, and identities. *Refer to the Accessibility Checklist in the Appendix* for related tips focusing on even more practices to employ to build a more trusting, brave, and comfortable space for all participants.



USING THE CURRICULUM



OVERVIEW

This curriculum seeks to empower us to “collect ourselves” through the educational tools and enthusiasm needed to pursue cooperative entrepreneurship. The workshops within the curriculum are not exhaustive in terms of the technical aspects of business development, however a lot of that information is accessible on the internet or via in-person resources (e.g. your county’s small business development office). Relatedly, don’t overcomplicate things or doubt your own abilities. People have started cooperatives throughout history without the support of “experts,” though experts can certainly be a great support and are sometimes totally necessary. All that said, this resource is a source of foundational information and empowerment to get a group sufficiently inspired and on the path of cooperative entrepreneurship.

SPACE & SUPPLIES

All of the workshops in this curriculum can be led almost anywhere your group is comfortable. None of the activities depend on internet access or audio-visual equipment. An ideal training space would have at least the following bare necessities: table, chairs, walls, and accessible room/bathroom (i.e. ADA compliant). *Check out the Accessibility Checklist in the Appendix for more information on suitable physical spaces and set-ups.*

A list of the supplies (e.g. markers, paper), related handouts and posters, and anything else needed for each workshop is included at the front end of each section in the curriculum. The following is a full list of the recommended facilitation kit for Collecting Ourselves which support your use of the curriculum:

- ✓ **CHART PAPER:** The kind of chart paper with an adhesive strip that allows you to place each sheet directly onto a surface is ideal but can be expensive. Poster putty or painters tape with non-adhesive chart paper works just fine and is a less expensive option.
- ✓ **CHART MARKERS:** There is a special kind of marker specifically for chart paper that makes writing visibly and legibly for a room of folks much easier. Sharpie brand chart markers and Mr. Sketch

markers are both great options. Steer clear of permanent (they can stain walls), as well as thin or chisel tip markers (writing is often not visible from faraway).

- ✓ **REGULAR MARKERS:** Participants will have several chances to take collective notes and/or draw pictures; regular markers have finer points and are better for these purposes (they're less expensive than chart markers, too).
- ✓ **PENS & PENCILS:** Even though you should advise participants to bring their own paper and pen for notes, having extra available is important as some folks will forget or may not be able to obtain them for the training.
- ✓ **POST-ITS:** Post-its are ideal for brief journaling activities, as participants can stick them on the wall and see what their peers had to say on the topic. Multiple colors can come in handy when trying to group different responses, track progress, or just make the room more cheerful.
- ✓ **POSTER PUTTY OR PAINTERS TAPE:** This comes in handy for a variety of uses (even if you have self-adhesive chart paper). You'd be surprised how many times you'll use the stuff (e.g. when post-its don't stick to some odd surface - like stucco!).
- ✓ **DICE:** You will need, at a minimum, one ten-sided die for the role playing activities in the latter half of the curriculum. It is ideal to have at least two ten-sided dice or a set of Percentile Dice (ask at any game store for these) per five people.
- ✓ **PRINTED OR COPIED MATERIALS:** There are several handouts and worksheets in the Appendix that you will need to have copies of for each workshop. You may also find other relevant articles or resources to share, as well.
- ✓ **SNACKS, CANDY, REFRESHMENTS:** Depending on the length of a session, providing food and drink will help participants remain energized and focused. At a bare minimum, a chocolate bar or apple slices to get participants through the latter half of a training is important. Access to drinking water is ideal – if you can get hot water for coffee and tea, that's even better!
- ✓ **DECORATIONS, TOYS, & REFERENCE MATERIALS:** Little things to visually liven up the space can set a good tone for the training. Little toys or trinkets can be helpful to participants who appreciate being able to 'busy' their hands while listening or conversing. Reference

materials (e.g. cooperative development primers) give folks something to look at during breaks or lulls in conversation.

- ✓ **SIGN-IN SHEETS:** Having participants write down their names and emails at the front end of the session gathers the information needed to send out follow-up materials or to communicate with participants about subsequent trainings.
- ✓ **MISC:** Scrap paper, erasers, tape, stapler, rocks to hold down papers if outside, etc.

If you give trainings often, putting together a basket containing your “facilitation kit” items can cut down on your prep time for workshops.

ADAPTATIONS

See “Licensing” for guidelines relating to creating and distributing adaptations.

“Collecting Ourselves” can be arranged in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a given group of participants. One size does not fit all, so aspects of the curriculum are modular and modifiable so as to support an educator in customizing the curriculum to suit different audiences, group sizes, and special interests. The curriculum is modifiable in service to its commitment to “**meeting people where they are at**” by:

- » **Making the content relevant to trainees**
- » **Making the format and training method accessible**

AUDIENCE

Specializing and adapting the curriculum is sometimes going to be necessary in order for the content to be relevant to your participants. Participants will benefit most if they “see themselves” - lifestyles, work, aspirations, identities, etc. - in the stories and contexts presented. Specific adaptation suggestions are included within individual sections of the curriculum. More generally, any activity using a fictional scenario, story, or case study presents a prime opportunity to personalize the content so it involves contexts and communities that are familiar and relateable to participants.

GROUP SIZE

In terms of size, the ‘sweet spot’ for these trainings has proven to be between ten and twenty for one educator and twenty to thirty participants for two educators. To experience success with a smaller or larger group, expect to do some tweaking. Additionally, be aware that there is a point at which a group becomes too small or too big for you to be effective. As a trainer, understanding

how you are most effective and what your boundaries are (e.g. how many people you can train at once, how much time you need to meet a given objective) is very important.

LARGE GROUPS

- ◀ As a great deal of dialogue and small group conversation can support the learning process, it is important for trainers to be mobile in the room and available to support small groups and paired conversations, as needed. Having a large participant to trainer ratio makes this support difficult or impossible, and can result in participants becoming distracted or disengaged during the independent dialogue time.
- ◀ Regardless of the number of trainers, as groups become larger, it becomes necessary to break into smaller groups for most of the curricular activities. If the group is larger than twenty and you have the luxury of two trainers, split participants into two groups unless otherwise indicated in the curriculum.

SMALL GROUPS:

- ◀ Adapting the curriculum to a more intimate training context with ten or fewer participants can be difficult - one option is to walk through most of the activities in the program as a single small group.
- ◀ With small groups, refrain from following the questions of the participants too much – i.e. beginning to advise on a problem or issue posed by a single participant rather than moving through the curriculum with everyone. While this could be a valuable exchange for them, it may not be useful to other participants (i.e. don't let a training become a consultation).

AGENDA

There are many different ways this curriculum could be organized to suit different timelines or to prioritize specific learning objectives. Each section can be used as an independent workshop. When beginning any training, always include some welcoming and warm-up activity that gets the group of participants introduced and more comfortable with each other and with you, as the educator. A good practice is to use an abbreviated version of the activities detailed in “Beginning the Work: Setting the Table.” A few example abbreviations to those activities are as follows:

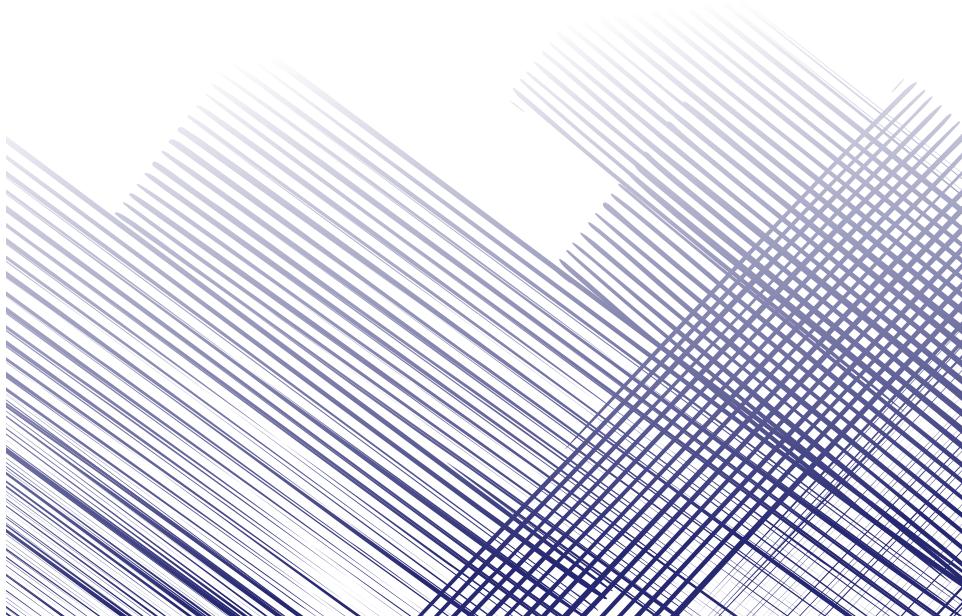
- ◀ Make the facilitator and participant introductions shorter – just stick to name, identity, and a simple prompt (e.g. “How did you get to the training today?” “One word that describes why you came to the training today.”).
- ◀ If your group already knows each other and/or meets regularly, you may find a simple “check-in” go-around (e.g. Share name + ask “How Ya

Doing?" is sufficient to ready the group for the workshop.

- ◀ Ensure you don't get bogged down by agenda discussions, if the total session time is brief. You may use your discretion to choose to not open up the agenda for amendments.
- ◀ Select a mixer activity that can be completed in five to ten minutes.

When scheduling multiple, cumulative sessions, refer to the sample agendas provided in the Appendix to guide you in your schedule setting process. The included sample agendas are for the following kinds of schedules:

- ✓ **SEASONAL WORKSHOPS:** This format was used throughout the Upper Midwest by TCI in 2014-2015. It consists of an introductory workshop ideal for a summer evening (three hours) and a full day (eight hours) intensive winter session that ultimately covers all the material. This format is structured to accommodate seasonal agricultural work, given the importance of agriculture to much of the TCI program's rural audience.
- ✓ **SEMESTER CLASS, BOOK CLUB, STUDY GROUP:** This schedule format fits the curriculum breakdown of individual sessions from 90-120 minutes. It is useful for any group that meets regularly for relatively short periods of time.
- ✓ **RETREAT, ACADEMY:** This schedule format is ideal for intensive work in a retreat-like setting or focused multi-day gathering (e.g. Academy, Camp). The content is divided into three hour sessions. The curriculum could be completed in two to four days; fewer days require scheduling some workshops in the evening hours.



COLLECTING OURSELVES

A COOPERATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM