

Cascadia Cooperative Network / Survey Report -- SLICE Roundtable 2010

Executive summary: Through the collaboration of SLICE RoundTable 2010 participants, a survey of Cascadia Regional Cooperative stakeholders was taken in 2011 to identify co-op needs, resources, and interest in participating in a regional cooperative development fund.

A broad cross-section of co-ops distributed throughout Cascadia responded to the survey (see figure 1, pg 2). Over 60% of the respondents have been in operation for over 10 yrs and have mature businesses that continue to grow at a moderate rate. An encouraging 93% of co-ops responded that their business was holding steady or improving. This indicates substantial strength in the co-op sector, as compared to traditional businesses during this economically difficult time.

The results indicated a need for cooperative development funds and support services. A majority of respondents were interested in assisting to create a development loan fund and also willing to mentor and share information with newly forming co-ops. The most common method of co-op financing reported has been through equity support from members and utilizing retained earnings to grow cooperative businesses.

A very strong interest in supporting a regional cooperative economy was expressed (92%). 87% of co-ops who responded are currently transacting business with other co-ops.

Addressing sustainability and social justice principles were reported to be actively practiced by 80% of responding co-ops. 57% specifically budget for these commitments

73% reported implementation of all 7 of the cooperative principles.

77% said they would like to be included in a regional directory.

The top suggestions for assistance to newly forming co-ops are Business Planning, Start-up Financing, and Marketing. Ongoing educational training for leadership is desired by the cooperatives.

Quote from respondent.

"Keep up the good work. Co-ops provide real solutions to many of the issues we face in the world today. Communities know best what to do for themselves and just need a little help getting there, Co-ops are one of the ways human beings get to exercise our right to self determination... Go Co-op, We do own it!"

To complete this process, SRT2010 will prepare a full report to be distributed Q4 2011. Compilation and hosting of a Cascadia Regional Cooperative directory will follow.

Background:

Slice 2010 RoundTable convened on Oct 22, 2010. Through a series of discussions, the project of creating a workgroup to explore the interest in a Cooperative Development Fund within the Cascadia Region was founded. This workgroup (SRT 2010) was comprised of representation from various stakeholders in the cooperative movement including various co-ops and technical service providers, as well as administrators of foundations. SRT 2010 met once a month from November 2010 until May 2011.

Discussions indicated a need for gathering additional data and input from the larger cross section of co-ops within the Cascadia region; identifying needs, available services, and interest of pursuing a unified cooperative

1063 S. Capitol Way # 211, Olympia, WA 98501
p.360.943.4241 | f.360.570.8415 | www.nwcdc.coop

support network. This led to forming a subgroup within SRT 2010 to draft, distribute, and analyze a survey that would be sent to various distribution lists with interests and activity in cooperatives.

During the months of June and July 2010, the survey was electronically distributed to over 1,000 recipients.. Personal reminders were sent to groups that SRT 2010 identified would add core content and benefit the results.

A survey analysis team met in mid August with the purpose of identifying:

- Range of co-ops and services.
- Database / Directory
- Support for Co-op Principles.
- Support to expand support for social justice.
- Appetite for loan fund.
- Baseline Metrics.
- Gap Analysis.
- Where to focus to help build a co-op economy.

Methodology of the survey:

The survey was drafted in a manner to solicit participation from co-op leadership, technical assistance, and professionals that serve cooperative businesses.

Results were carefully screened to remove any duplicate responses.

Data was analyzed and drafted into a preliminary report (of which this is a part). The complete report and relevant supporting data will be posted at <http://NWDC.coop> by January 2012

Preliminary findings:

Respondents represent 13% of total audience solicited; this is within typical results for an online survey.

Of the respondents;

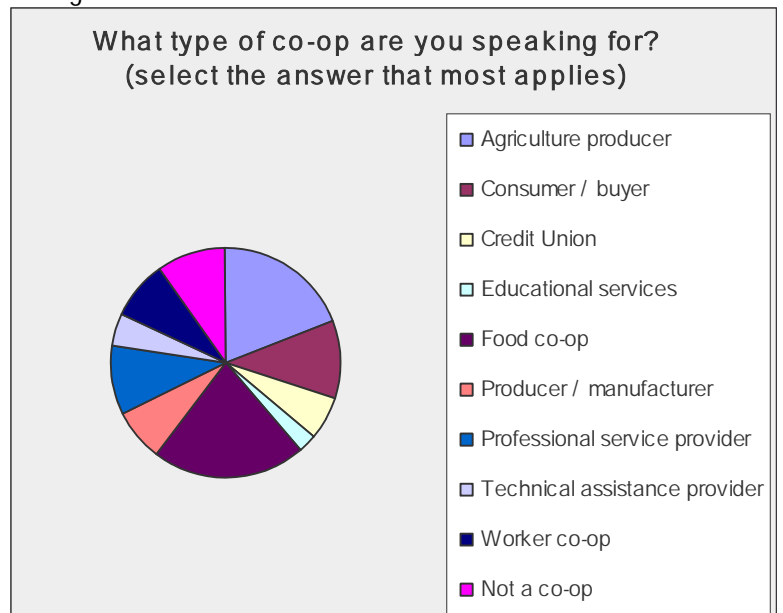
- 70% are principle leadership in their cooperative organization.
- 11% educators and technical assistance providers.
- 7% professional service providers.

Existing co-ops expressed the desire to assist newly forming co-ops. 10% are currently mentoring others;

- Sharing 'lessons learned'.
- Sharing documents.
- 77% would like to be included in a regional directory.

Respondents overwhelmingly (80%) expressed actively supporting sustainability and social

Figure 1



justice principles. 57% budget specifically for this.

Co-ops are accessible; Over 50% of respondents have a member “buy in” of under \$100.

Business is strong in the co-op sector;

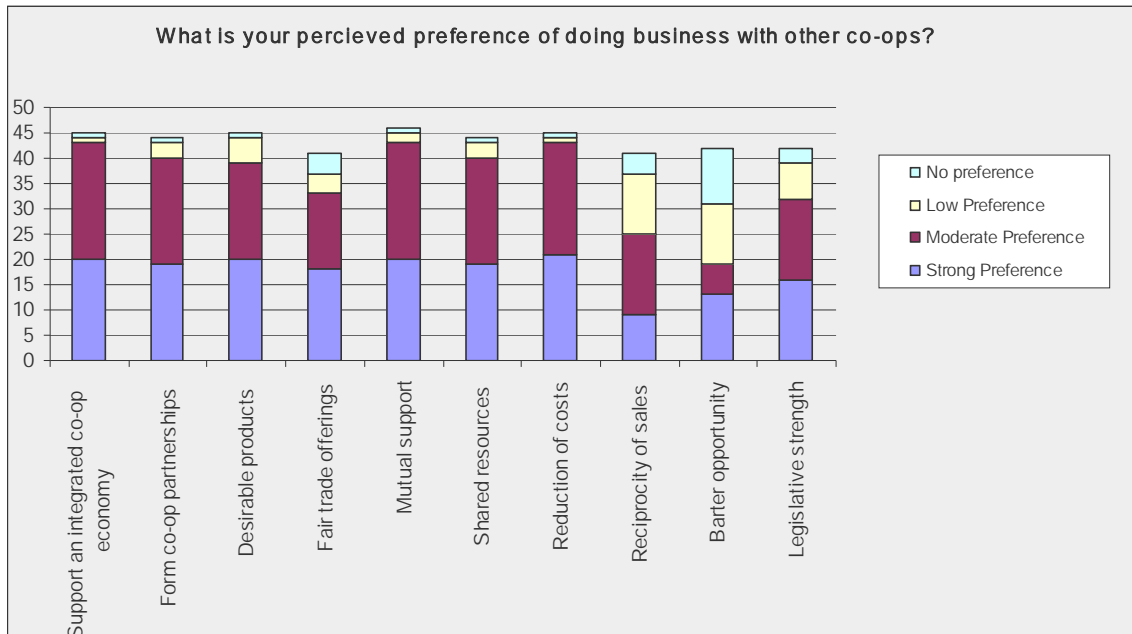
93% report their business is holding steady or improving. (This is far higher than the national norm at this time)

Co-ops offer longevity; Over 57% of respondents polled have been in operation for over 10 years.

Interest in supporting and growing the cooperative economy was strong

- 87% of co-ops responding currently do business with other co-ops. This is great news!

Figure 2



Funding:

- 86% reported that members significantly participate in providing capital.
- 40% of respondents have utilized member loans.
- 53% have been able to secure traditional lending.
- Access to operating capital is reported to be a barrier.

Participants were interested in forming and participating in a regional loan fund. 74% of respondents would like to see a co-op development fund made available.

Gap Analysis - areas to immediately improve;

- Access to start-up funds, business, and strategic planning were identified as Highest priority/Highest need.
- Top priority for new co-ops, is a Co-op Development Fund, followed by Marketing Assistance
- Existing co-ops identified a desire for stronger member involvement and ‘on-going’ leadership training.

Items of interest - sampling of comments;

What would enable your organization to better serve the needs of cooperatives?

More training, more time, more money, more co-op consultants, more co-op attorneys, more co-op accountants, more partnerships / networking

Expanded and continuing education on legal structures and tax accounting to include lower-cost options for professional services in those areas. More educational events to improve individual/group understanding of the benefits provided in cooperative structures. More sources of capital to fund start-ups.

A stronger community of practice with other coop expertise-- more sharing of best practices- more regional / on line training- access to info

Database of existing cooperatives and perspective cooperatives in the state who are receiving technical assistance from service providers, who the providers are, what are the additional needs of the cooperatives and service providers beyond what we currently offer, and linkage to educate the cooperatives about our funding programs for future assistance.

More education of the legal community about cooperative business is sorely needed.

Collaborate work with similar organizations. Access to funding opportunities.

Closing: Acknowledgements

SLICE Round Table 2010 has had a very busy and productive year, and feels the ongoing work of SLICE will be of significant benefit to growing and supporting the Cascadia Regional Cooperative economy. As representatives of many co-ops and service organizations we exercise our obligation to benefit the broader population of cooperative members and potential members in the Cascadia Region. We trust our efforts will improve the success of your own organizations.

Special thanks and appreciation is due our financial contributors to the project: xxx

Additional gratitude is given to the many volunteer participants who spent several Fridays commuting to Seattle to provide engaging ideas and representation of their cooperative areas of expertise.