



# A Cooperative Colorado

*Findings from the Cooperative Policy Roundtable*  
May 1, 2019

## **Colorado is poised to provide a national model for creating an inclusive, democratic economy.**

This starts with our leadership on employee ownership, as well as other kinds of community ownership like credit unions, rural electrics, food hubs, and online platforms. Co-ops have helped build Colorado, and we want to work with the administration to make Colorado the best place in the country to build cooperative businesses.

We invite the administration to help us do this by:

- Continuing to participate in grassroots policy and business convening
- Collaborating with promoting state-level branding, such as Colorado.coop
- Declaring a Colorado Cooperatives Day to celebrate this legacy and opportunity

## **Our legacy**

Different kinds of cooperatives have been a bedrock of the Colorado economy throughout the state's history—especially for the most marginalized—from 19th-century Grange halls to an early Black-owned saddlery co-op in Denver. This legacy continues today. Our economy depends on its rural electric co-ops, telecom co-ops, credit unions, farmers' producer co-ops, and small business purchasing co-ops. These amount to about 400 cooperative businesses and almost a thousand co-op franchisees and branches.

Now, a new generation of cooperators is trying to use this model to access a more equitable and just economy. But the tools developed for earlier generations aren't always up to the task of our new challenges. Policies designed for farmer cooperatives aren't prepared for accelerating co-op tech startups or empowering immigrant worker co-ops. That's why we're helping to lead a national conversation about the kinds of policies and entrepreneurship we need to make cooperative enterprise more available and more accessible than ever before.

These are some strategies we're exploring to strengthen the Colorado co-op economy:

## **Awareness and education**

*Too few Coloradans know what co-ops are—much less how to work or shop at one.*

- Promotion and outreach around a Colorado cooperative brand
- Improved information about co-op models from state offices and library districts
- Training for members of older co-ops on their rights and opportunities
- Centers for co-op education and research at state universities
- Support youth education through 4-H and electric co-op summer camps
- X Prize-style statewide contests for co-op startups

## **Technical support**

*We have only about a dozen co-op developers working statewide—it's time to scale up.*

- Greater capacity for culturally appropriate technical support in diverse communities through highly trained co-op developers
- Training for state economic development staff on a wide range of co-op models
- Improved measurement and tracking of co-op opportunities and impacts
- Education, peer-to-peer support, and succession planning for operational managers and boards

## **Capital access**

*The economy is tilted for investor ownership—we can level the field for communities.*

- Loan guarantees and lender education for diverse forms of co-op businesses
- Statewide procurement preferences for cooperative and worker-owned business
- Right of first refusal in ownership transitions, such as for employees and multifamily apartment residents
- Grant opportunities favoring democratic cooperative business endeavors
- Financing through public capital pools such as pension funds
- Preference for multi-stakeholder "social co-ops" for public-private partnerships

We look forward to working with your administration to advance goals such as these.

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