



Cooperative Leaders and Scholars (CLS) Fellowship FAQ

What is CLS?

CLS provides cross-sector leadership development and builds professional networks for new and emerging cooperative leaders and scholars. This 8-month fellowship provides opportunities to participate in multi-sector programming and events, and to engage with thought leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders. This community empowers and trains its fellows to build a more inclusive economy in North America, together.

Who is eligible to apply?

Applicants must be pursuing a career in, working with, or studying cooperatives, credit unions, or mutual insurance. You are eligible if you fall into at least one of the following categories: 1) you are an emerging cooperative leader (ages 18 – 35), 2) you are new to cooperatives (fewer than 5 years of experience in co-op work), 3) you are a current post-secondary student of any age with an interest in cooperatives. Applicants must live in North America.

What does CLS achieve?

CLS attracts, engages, and retains talent in the co-op business community; deepens and broadens cross-sector knowledge of cooperatives; provides leadership training for the next generation of leaders; and brings people together from across the co-op business community to foster cross-sectoral relationships, support networks, and collaboration early in their careers.

What is the cost of the program?

CDF provides funding to CLS Fellows. Funding includes registration fees for NCBA CLUSA's Co-op IMPACT Conference, CDF's Cooperative Hall of Fame, and a short course from the International Centre for Co-operative Management at Saint Mary's University. Fellows are also awarded a \$1,000 travel stipend, shared accommodations, and most meals for two in-person gatherings, as well as exclusive networking events, workshops, and webinars from industry experts.



Cooperative
Leaders &
Scholars
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How many people are accepted annually?

Each cohort is a maximum of 20 people subject to funding support.

Can my organization sponsor my participation?

Yes! Up to five slots are reserved for sponsored fellowships. Sponsored fellows are still required to qualify under the program's eligibility criteria and must submit an application. The cost to sponsor a fellow is \$5,000. Interested in sponsoring a fellow? Contact Kirstie Boyette at kboyette@cdf.coop.

What is the duration of the fellowship?

CLS is an 8-month fellowship that begins in April and concludes in December. Programming includes monthly webinars and two in-person events held in April and October.

When are webinars scheduled and for how long?

Webinars are two hours long and typically fall on the third Wednesday of each month. Webinar dates include: April 1, May 20, June 17, July 15, August 19, September 16, November 18, and December 2. The webinars on May 20 and September 16 are joint workshops with CLS alumni.

When are the in-person events scheduled and where?

The in-person events will be held in Hudson Valley, New York and New York City from April 20 – 24, 2026 and Washington, DC from October 5 – 9, 2026.

Can I participate if I can't attend the in-person events?

Building community with each other is an important component of CLS. We require all applicants to participate in both in-person events.

Who is invited to webinars and in-person events?

Some webinars will be exclusively for the fellows, and some sessions will include CLS alumni. In-person events may also include CLS alumni participation.

What is a capstone project?

The culmination of the CLS fellowship is a capstone project that can be completed individually or in a small group. Fellows select projects based on several parameters, including alignment with CDF's strategic framework, as well as relevance to the fellows' own cooperative work and personal interests. CLS staff work with fellows to develop their capstone topics as well as connect fellows with cooperative information, experts, and organizations – within and outside of their sector and geography – that can provide critical insight and valuable connections to enhance project success and advance fellows' networks and professional development.

Will there be a time for us to ask questions about CLS?

Yes! CLS staff will host a virtual information session on January 14, 2026. If you can't make it, register and we'll send you the recording. Potential applicants are also welcome to contact Kirstie Boyette at kboyette@cdf.coop.

When are applications due?

Applications are due on February 2 at 11:59pm ET. Applicants will be notified of their status on February 16.