

Strategic Plan 2026–2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CDF serves as the apex US cooperative foundation. Through grantmaking and programming, CDF builds the capacity of the cooperative business community to solve societal challenges, reinforce democratic decision-making, and improve economic opportunities for all. As a result, more people in our nation can address their needs, pursue their aspirations, build shared wealth, and thrive in community.

CDF's strategic approach to building the capacity of the cooperative business community includes:



Cross-Sector Outreach & Leadership Development

We **engage** and **build** the capacity of new, diverse cooperators, including young people and people in adjacent movements, and offer cross-sector training and leadership development.



National Co-op Support System

We **strengthen** and **align** co-op support organizations – such as researchers, funders, and developers – to ensure cooperatives can access actionable knowledge, non-extractive capital, and high-quality education and technical assistance.



Place-Based Demonstration

Through local demonstrations, we **learn** what it takes to create robust and connected cooperative economies, and we **spread** the resulting models to other communities.

Drawing on the internationally recognized Cooperative Values & Principles, CDF's approach is rooted in integrity, equity and inclusion, collaboration and openness, and solidarity and social responsibility.

CDF operates as the sister 501c3 to the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) CLUSA International, the apex cooperative business association.

OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

CDF was established as the Freedom Fund in 1944 by the Cooperative League of the United States of America (CLUSA), Nationwide, and Farmland Industries to reconstruct and develop cooperatives in Europe after World War II. Over the years, CDF's purpose and mission have evolved, such as in the 1970s when the Foundation shifted from the development of cooperatives internationally to domestic cooperative development. Since 2000, the Foundation formed the Cooperative Development Fund, and in the 2010s, the Foundation's assets more than doubled with the creation of the Cooperative Education and the CoBank University Giving Funds. In addition to grantmaking and fundraising for cooperatives, the Foundation has engaged in four areas of programmatic work in the past decade – home care, native agriculture, affordable housing, and the cultivation of the next generation of cooperative leaders and scholars.

In this next phase of CDF, we envision building on that history by continuing and growing:

Going forward, we see opportunities to fill unmet needs by:

The Cooperative Leaders and Scholars leadership development program



Our grantmaking funds for development, education, and disaster recovery



The Co-op 5k and Cooperative Hall of Fame



Bringing new people into the cooperative business community and building their leadership skills and cooperative identity



Aligning and expanding cooperative support to strengthen new and existing cooperatives



Demonstrating – and spreading – insights about what it takes to foster robust, local, co-op economies



We will thoughtfully transition our initiatives related to home care co-ops and shared equity models for affordable housing in partnership with key stakeholders. CDF will incorporate lessons learned and continue to support the partnerships and work in those sectors – and others – through the lens of our capacity building focus. Going forward, NCBA CLUSA will expand their domestic development efforts with an eye to supporting the application of the co-op model in new ways and in new industries.

VALUES



Integrity

CDF operates with honesty, respect, and accountability to the cooperative business community.



Equity & Inclusion

CDF values the multiplicity of perspectives in our society and creates space for people to come together across lines of difference.



Collaboration & Openness

CDF welcomes new ideas and actively collaborates – meeting people where they are – to achieve our shared vision.



Solidarity & Social Responsibility

CDF cares for others and stewards our resources to maximize positive impact in society.

IDENTITY, STRATEGY, MISSION, & VISION STATEMENTS

Identity

CDF operates as the apex US cooperative foundation and partner to NCBA CLUSA, the apex cooperative business association.

Strategy

Through grantmaking and programming, CDF grows, diversifies, and strengthens the cooperative business community.

Mission

CDF builds the capacity of the cooperative business community to solve societal challenges, reinforce democratic decision-making, and improve economic opportunities for all.

Vision

All people can address their needs, pursue their aspirations, build shared wealth, and thrive in community.

THEORY OF CHANGE

IF...

CDF has extensive reach, strong brand, robust partnerships, healthy financial position, and effective leadership & management

THEN WE CAN...

Increase the number, diversity, and capacity of cooperators in the US

Individuals

Build capacity and alignment among co-op support organizations

Organizations & National Field

Strengthen local co-op economies

Local Co-op Economies

IN ORDER TO...

Increase the number of people regularly practicing democratic decision-making through cooperatives

Leverage the co-op model to solve key societal challenges & improve economic opportunities for all

AS A RESULT...

People can address their needs, pursue their aspirations, build shared wealth, and thrive in community

STRATEGY SUMMARY

CDF will take a collaborative approach to...

Cross-Sector Outreach & Leadership Development

Increase the number, diversity, and capacity of cooperators in the United States

Increase outreach & exposure activities for youth/young adults and new cooperators from aligned movements

- Expose youth and young adults to the cooperative model
- Raise the visibility of co-ops and engage people from adjacent movements (economic development, affordable housing, financial inclusion, and democratic practice)

Increase access to cross-sector training, networking, and leadership development

- Increase access to cooperative training and networking opportunities
- Offer cross-sector leadership development to new and emerging leaders

Strengthen the cooperative identity

- Build co-op identity through events (Co-op 5K, Hall of Fame) and communications
- Increase co-op visibility across all audiences

National Co-op Support System

Build capacity and alignment among co-op support organizations

Strengthen/diversify co-op development & education to increase access to high quality technical assistance and learning

- Map the co-op education continuum and identify gaps
- Expand and make more accessible co-op development tools/guides
- Support co-op development organizations and associations to adapt to new funding realities
- Identify cross-sector needs/ strategies

Align and expand co-op funders to increase co-op access to non-extractive capital

- Engage grantmakers to align and expand the flow of grant dollars to co-ops
- Engage financial institutions to design lending and investing to meet co-op needs

Align and expand cooperative research/data to increase co-op access to actionable knowledge

- Convene and support cooperative researchers
- Make co-op research more accessible

Place-Based Demonstration

Strengthen local co-op economies

Demonstrate what it takes to create strong local co-op economies with supportive local policy, accessible funding, training/technical assistance, and cooperation among co-ops

- Support a cohort of communities to strengthen the local co-op policy environment, funding access, development infrastructure and cooperation among cooperatives

Spread and replicate models for strong, cross-sector co-op economies

- Establish and promote case studies and cross-cutting lessons / best practices for developing a robust cooperative economy
- Develop model local/state policies and spread through appropriate associations