



# *Solidarity Rising in Massachusetts*

How Solidarity Economy Movement is Emerging  
in Lower-Income Communities of Color



a Report by the  
**Solidarity Economy Initiative**  
February 2017

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## Preface

This report was commissioned by the Massachusetts-based Solidarity Economy Initiative (SEI), which was convened in 2015 to support grassroots organizations to lead a movement for a solidarity economy. SEI was developed by [Access Strategies Fund](#), [Boston Impact Initiative](#), [Center for Economic Democracy](#), and [Solidago Foundation](#). It organizes resources, technical assistance, and infrastructure for frontline organizations to develop movement-building strategies to transform American capitalism as a root cause of social and ecological injustice.

SEI's community partners include [Alternatives for Community & Environment](#), [Black Economic Justice Institute](#), [Boston Workers Alliance](#), [Brazilian Women's Group](#), [Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity](#), [Centro Presente](#), [Chelsea Collaborative](#), [Chinese Progressive Association](#), [City Life Vida Urbana](#), [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#), [Ex-Prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement](#), [Matahari Women Workers Center](#), [Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts](#), [Neighbors United for a Better East Boston](#), and [New England United for Justice](#).

This report shows how a movement for solidarity economy is emerging among lower-income communities and communities of color in Massachusetts. It depicts the diverse pathways towards transformation that are arising out of community survival needs and the struggles against the inequalities and exploitation produced by current political and economic systems. We hope that these visions, strategies, and practices can inform and inspire those who share aspirations for a more just, sustainable, and democratic economy and politics.

February 2017

### **Solidarity Rising in Massachusetts:**

How a Solidarity Economy Movement is Emerging  
in Lower-Income Communities of Color

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# Executive Summary

A **solidarity economy movement** is emerging from lower-income communities of color in Massachusetts. This movement aspires to transform capitalism—as we know it—into a world rooted in values of democracy, justice, and sustainability. These dreams arise from those making Black Lives Matter, from immigrant workers making poverty wages, from ex-prisoners locked out of the mainstream economy, from tenants barely able to make rent, and from communities being displaced to make way for the 1%.

Solidarity economy is more than just cooperatives. It is a social justice movement seeking to transform political and economic systems and our worldviews. Like other movements, it is **shifting our consciousness** about root causes and what is wrong, expanding our vision of what is possible, and inspiring dreams of the world as it should be. It is **building power**, not just to resist and reform the injustices and unsustainabilities produced by current systems, but ultimately to democratically control and govern political and economic resources to sustain people and the planet. And it is **creating economic alternatives and prototypes** for producing, exchanging, consuming, and investing in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic.

This report examines eight cases across lower-income communities of color in Massachusetts to see solidarity economy movement in motion. We find that aspirations for transformation are spreading. Communities are organizing to resist and reform the current system, while building alternatives that go beyond capitalism. They are incubating worker-owned coops, community land trusts, and community-controlled capital. They are modeling an economy and democratic governance based on collective care and putting people and planet over profit. Communities are dreaming big, of building regional ecosystems that can scale up transformative impacts.

**These efforts are often born of necessity.** When good green jobs were not available to community members, youth in Worcester started [Toxic Soil Busters](#) to clean up lead-contaminated soil and unemployed workers in Boston created the [CERO](#) recycling cooperative. In East Boston, residents who had been displaced from their apartment building began exploring economic alternatives as a way to stay in a gentrifying neighborhood.

Though anchored in communities, **the movement is building solidarity across a spectrum of political perspec-**

**tives and sectors.** In Springfield, [Wellspring](#) is building a network of worker-owned cooperatives with partnership of major anchor institutions, such as Baystate Health and University of Massachusetts Amherst. [The Boston Ujima Project](#) and [Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network](#) are developing alliances with private investors and banks. [New Lynn Coalition](#) and [Worcester Solidarity and Green Economy \(SAGE\) Alliance](#) are uniting labor unions and communities of color to fight for good jobs and economic development that is also community development.

**Communities are resisting and reforming the current system in ways that also create more space for alternatives.** [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's](#) (DSNI) successful organizing in the 1980s against disinvestment and vacant lots led to community ownership over thirty acres of land through a community land trust. [Alliance to Develop Power's](#) (ADP) tenant organizing in the 1990s resulted in tenant ownership of 770 units in four housing developments. CERO coop members continue to organize and advocate for zero waste policies to reduce environmental impacts, but also to create more economic opportunities for its business.

**These alternatives have had to innovate and take unconventional approaches to business development.** In all cases, nonprofits play critical roles, providing incubation resources, organizing and building the base, and doing research and development to support new models. Coop academies have supported the startup of coops from Worcester to Boston. ADP wove together a web of tenant-owned nonprofit housing developments with a for-profit subsidiary providing maintenance and landscaping services to those developments.

**All of these efforts are inspiring (and inspired by) collective dreams of the world as it should be.** ADP's long-time director Carolyn Murray believes that “we need to think big -- we need to stake our flag way out ahead”<sup>19</sup> so that we can move “from opposition to governance.”<sup>42</sup> ADP's approach to building a community economy was so compelling that another grassroots group across the country aspired “to be ADP when they grow up.”<sup>16</sup>

These groups are envisioning **transformation through an ecosystem approach, where scaling up happens through interlinking many locally controlled initiatives.** The Ujima project is building a community-controlled capital fund to support an ecosystem that includes community-owned and

certified businesses and democratic control over development. SAGE is comprised of many smaller startup coops but also includes a credit union, a worker-owned union print shop, and two cooperatively-run maker spaces. DSNI is anchoring the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network, which brings together more than a dozen neighborhood groups seeking community ownership of land.

**At the base of these big dreams is collective care for each other—solidarity.** In Worcester, union plumbers and carpenters volunteered to rebuild Stone Soup community center after a fire because the center housed the groups that

were their allies in fighting for good jobs. In East Boston, the Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity sees its work as transforming life, starting with the basics. Member Lilliana Avendaño says, “if you have a childcare where you are taking care of the children, a place where people can eat healthy food, and have a cleaning coop that cleans these places, and everybody involved has the same values, that is when we are going to see transformation in individuals, families and our neighborhood. That will help decrease the violence and will give chance for marginalized people to become powerful. That is my dream.”

There are significant challenges and tensions in the work of building solidarity economy:

- Capitalist mindsets need to be overcome, including the skepticism that alternatives are possible.
- Differences arising from race, ethnicity, class, and organizational capacity must be addressed through deep internal work and relationship building.
- Despite the challenges of doing transformative work from within the nonprofit sector, we need to find ways to use the strengths of this sector to build vehicles for transformation.
- More resources need to be garnered towards the core work of organizing and supporting the startup of alternatives.
- The potential for conflicts between community organizing and sustaining a business is ever-present and needs to be negotiated carefully and creatively.

These challenges are well worth taking on to build transformative pathways towards solidarity economy. Based on our learnings from Massachusetts, we offer the following recommendations for the movement:

- See solidarity economy holistically, as a transformative social movement.
- Join up the building of alternatives with resist and reform efforts.
- Be willing to innovate and be prepared to fail forward.
- Take an ecosystem approach to building and scaling up.
- Support core organizing and incubation infrastructure.
- Inspire and connect initiatives so that we can learn from one another and scale up.
- Build the solidarity finance sector, with funders and investors who see themselves as part of, and not apart from, the movement.

# Introduction

The recent presidential election lay bare a deep dissatisfaction over a political system and economy “rigged” for the 1%. But while some place their hope in a mythical white past, many others are calling for a “new economy”—one that is more just, sustainable, and democratic. These desires for deep, transformational change come not just from those who are dissatisfied, but even more from those communities that are simply struggling to survive. These dreams arise from those making Black Lives Matter, from immigrant workers making poverty wages, from ex-prisoners locked out of the mainstream economy, from tenants barely able to make rent, and from communities being displaced to make way for the 1%.

Calls for a “new” economy in lower-income communities and communities of color are not new. In fact, our communities have long innovated collective strategies for survival, such as mutual aid, community organizing, self-help, and cooperatives of all kinds, showing us that not only is another world possible but it is already here in bits and pieces. These practices have been embedded in black liberation movements, the early labor movement, and many other progressive movements in the US. In other parts of the world, particularly Latin America, movements have been fighting for and implementing these strategies explicitly as “solidarity economy”.

In this report, we use the term **solidarity economy** to refer to visions, strategies, and practices towards a more just, sustainable, and democratic society. We prefer this term to “new economy” not only because the work we are talking about is not new, but also because it names a core value. “Solidarity” invokes that idea that we are all in this together and that there are common bonds between all human beings (and living beings on Earth). The term is not yet widely heard in the US but we use it here to signal our inspi-

ration by solidarity economy movements across the globe.

Solidarity economy is a movement aspiring to transform the system that is commonly called “capitalism” or simply “business as usual”. With the downfall of the Soviet Union and China’s rise in the global economy, the capitalism-versus-communism framework has become outdated. In the twenty-first century, it may seem that US-style capitalism (what some call neoliberalism) is the only system left. But what we need is a long-term vision of transformation that is not stuck in old paradigms of either socialist revolution or endless capitalism.

In seeking transformation, we must keep in mind that the systems we want to change are not only economic, but also political and cultural. Capitalism is not only an economic system, but also a political system supported and enabled by government (belying the rhetoric of free markets). And it is also a powerful set of ideas—an ideology—that shapes our view of the world and what we believe is possible.

We expect that attempts to build solidarity economy will have to contend with powerful forces associated with capitalism. Because we do not have the luxury of creating solidarity economy in a vacuum, we must build solidarity alternatives **at the same time** that we struggle to reform the political, economic, and ideological systems that are making life so difficult for so many.

Unlike some social change theories, we do not believe that there is a single path for transformation beyond capitalism. Nor is solidarity economy simply a wholesale replacement of capitalism. Rather, transformation will have many roots and sprouts, each situated in their own place, figuring out how to meet needs in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic. This report examines eight cases of solidarity economy movement across Massachusetts.



*Courtesy of WellSpring*

# Goals of This Report

**Our first goal is to make visible the diverse ways that solidarity economy is being conceived of, pursued, and practiced by lower-income communities and communities of color in Massachusetts.** Our communities are leading the way and innovating out of necessity. What we are already doing can be the building blocks of transformation.

**A second goal is to view solidarity economy holistically, as a movement for political, economic, and cultural transformation.** Often times, when the term economy is invoked, we only think about businesses and markets. But economy includes all the ways that we meet our needs and care for each other. Economy is shaped by politics, governments, and social movements.

**Finally, we hope that by seeing what is already happening and understanding the emerging visions and strategies, this report will inform further development of solidarity economy movements.** We believe that grassroots organizations, funders, government, businesses, and other stakeholders all have important roles to play in a solidarity economy movement.

This report is guided by a solidarity economy framework that has emerged from practice. The Solidarity Economy Initiative (SEI) was formed out of dialogue with leaders and practitioners among community-based social justice organizations in Massachusetts over the past several years. We see ourselves as fighting bravely, but still losing ground. We identified six themes to help build a more transformative approach to change:

- 1. Long Term Vision for Alternatives to Capitalism.** This vision is necessary, because "if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."
- 2. Cooperative Economic Development.** A growing number of groups are experimenting with worker cooperatives, community land trusts and democratic financing models to express a more expansive approach to building local control, wealth and power. We can build on these already existing elements of solidarity economy.
- 3. Multisectoral Organizing.** While Massachusetts' organizing sector engages hundreds of thousands of residents as voters, workers, and residents, there is an opportunity to build broader coalitions capable of challenging consolidated corporate power. These include alliances with the small business sector, progressive capital and finance providers, and the progressive faith community.
- 4. Political Power-Building Innovation.** We need political tools that move beyond voter engagement to build independent political power towards a vision of self governance.
- 5. Healing and Transformative Leadership.** A transformative movement must also help our communities heal from the trauma of institutional and cultural persecution. This is inextricably linked to our ability to fight for our collective freedom.
- 6. Organizational Capacity Building.** Member-led, nonprofit base-building organizations are essential to a transformative movement, but too many of our groups are barely hanging on. We need to fortify the infrastructure for more stable and sustainable organizations.

This report begins by laying out our evolving framework for understanding solidarity economy as a transformative movement. This framework was informed by our dialogue within SEI, as well as previous research into solidarity economies (and diverse community economies) by both practitioners and academics. In developing the framework, we also consulted with those associated with a number of solidarity economy mapping initiatives around the country, most affiliated with the [US Solidarity Economy Network](#).

Our framework is then applied to tell the stories of eight cases across Massachusetts. Interviews were conducted with key contacts for each case and supplemented by other published materials. Several of these initiatives are ones with which the authors have been directly involved so the report includes our own experiential knowledge and observations.

# Solidarity Economy is a Transformational Movement

Solidarity economy is more than just cooperatives and other alternative economic institutions. We view solidarity economy holistically, as a social justice movement. Like other movements, it is **shifting our consciousness** not only to uncover root causes and what is wrong, but also to expand our vision of what is possible, and to inspire dreams of the world as it should be. It is **building power**, not just to resist and reform the injustices and unsustainabilities produced by current systems, but ultimately to democratically control and govern political and economic resources to sustain people and the planet. And it is **creating economic alternatives and prototypes** for producing, exchanging, consuming, and investing in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic.

Seeing all these three dimensions of solidarity economy together will help us build pathways towards transformation rather than more dead ends. Capitalism, itself, is a multi-faceted system of economic institutions, political governance, and ideology (or world view). If we want to truly transform and go beyond capitalism, then we must confront it in all three of these dimensions: consciousness, power, and economy.

All too often, we can become trapped into capitalist ways of thinking and doing—what some call **capitalocentrism**.<sup>1</sup> This limits our imagination of what is possible to only capitalistic ways and relegates other ways to “pipe dreams” or as contrary to human “nature”. It does so in part by making invisible the multiple and diverse economies that actually exist and that we already use to meet our needs and care for each other. Economies that involve gifts, trade and barter, producing for self, and mutual assistance (just to name a few) are not perceived as “economic” because they do not involve market exchange using money or do not treat goods and services as commodities.

Even in the US, we are all involved in non-capitalist economic systems. This includes those of us who grow our own food in a garden or take care of our own children or elders instead of paying others for those goods and services. Indeed many of these non-capitalist ways are what make survival possible for our communities and make life meaningful. Some of these activities are explicitly rooted

in values of democracy, sustainability, and justice. **They are solidarity economy already in action.**

Furthermore, the capitalist mindset separates economy from society and nature. It is as if economy exists apart from people, communities, government, and the planet we all share. It sees economy as its own machine, running on the logic of profit and market competition. Solidarity economy movement is about reclaiming diverse economies and reintegrating society and nature with economy.

The work of envisioning the future and “making the road by walking” means undoing the capitalocentrism that grips our political and economic institutions and our culture and beliefs. We are in a period where the contradictions between what capitalism promises and what it delivers are stark and growing. There is increasing recognition that the current system is broken and possibly dying. In lower-income communities and communities of color, these realities have been obvious for generations. Yet, we struggle to envision transformative pathways.

We are not starting from nothing. The seeds and sprouts of this movement already here, established on ground laid by previous struggles and liberation movements in the US and beyond. There is a long tradition of African American cooperative development strategies espoused by leaders from W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey to Ella Jo Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer.<sup>2</sup> Many immigrants in our communities come from Latin America and the Caribbean where solidarity economy and cooperative movements have long been active.

What we see happening in lower-income communities of color in Massachusetts is an emerging solidarity economy movement. It aspires to transformational change. It is creating alternatives for the future, while at the same time resisting and reforming current systems. The movement is challenged externally by political and economic forces that seek to further exploit and marginalize our communities. It is challenged internally by capitalist thinking and outdated theories of change. Yet, there are opportunities both within and beyond our communities to make headway towards a solidarity economy, by shifting consciousness, building power, and creating economic alternatives.

# Three Dimensional Framework for Solidarity Economy Movement

We use three dimensions to help us assess the trajectories of solidarity economy movement. While each dimension is its own lens -- a way to see and understand one facet of solidarity economy movement -- we need to look at all three dimensions combined, for transformation involves movement across all three. Also, while one effort may emphasize one dimension over the others, the work affects all three dimensions simultaneously.

## 1. Consciousness

Winning “hearts and minds” is a common refrain for social movements. Movements for justice are not just driven by people angry at the way things are, but by people with a dream of how the world could be and the belief that it can be achieved. These beliefs we hold and visions we desire are key resources for action. Consciousness can be assessed on several levels:

**Desire for transformation** – to what extent is there acknowledgement of the need for transformative change and how is this desire being expressed? To what extent is there an analysis of capitalism or existing structures and an attempt to undo capitalocentrism?

**Articulation of vision** – how is the vision being expressed? To what extent is there explicit use of a solidarity economy frame?

**Theory of transformation** – what are the ideas about how transformative change can happen?

Note that consciousness is always in process and interacts with the other two dimensions. Our thoughts and awareness are shaped by the relative positions of power we exercise and the institutions that we are a part of. One can have a desire for transformation, but not have a clear articulation of vision. One can have a vision, but not have an idea of how to get there. Also, one may be practicing solidarity economy values but not link their actions to a broader vision.

Consciousness building happens in varying ways. Some initiatives are explicit about a solidarity economy vision, while for others it is embedded. The work of consciousness building can involve:

### **Popular education and leadership development**

– facilitates people coming to their own understanding of the structures that create the conditions they are fighting to change and develop their vision for the world as they want it to be.

**Mapping** – makes visible the solidarity economy initiatives that already exist or are in formation and help them find each other.

**Planning and strategy** – incorporates an analysis of broader structures and transformative vision into the plans and strategies for organizing, advocacy campaigns, and building of economic alternatives.

**Communications** – articulates vision and transformative pathways for internal and external audiences.

## 2. Power-Building

Movements also say they are “flexing their muscles” to describe their exercise of power to achieve change. Building power is a common phrase in the mission statements of many movement organizations. Often times, the conception of power is limited to the political realm, where power is exercised in elections and policy advocacy. In this narrow interpretation, power-building may seem disconnected from solidarity economy because it is about resistance and reform within the confines of what is politically feasible today. But power-building must be a fundamental aspect of solidarity economy movement if our goal is transformation.

Power-building for transformation means changing the very nature of our political institutions in terms of who controls them and towards what ends. We still have to fight against the policies that advantage and steer public resources towards capitalist enterprises that exploit and oppress lower-income communities and communities of color. But at the same time, we can also win supportive policies and public resources for alternative economic institutions. And in organizing resistance and mobilizing for reform, we build our democratic muscles. While these muscles are well exercised in protest, they must also be trained to exercise collective control over the economy and our governments.



Power is built within organizations, as well in coalitions, networks, and movements. Power-building is most often associated with community organizing for political and policy campaigns, but can also happen through the startup and governance of alternative economic institutions, such as cooperatives and mutual aid associations. We see power-building on several levels:

**Resist** – organizes communities to defend against threats and attacks and the injustices perpetrated by government and corporations.

**Reform** – builds power for incremental change in order to improve immediate conditions. Although reform campaigns are not, by definition, transformative, they can be critical for mobilizing and involving large numbers of people, thus creating opportunities to develop consciousness and solidarity with others in and beyond their communities.

**Govern and Control** – exercises democratic community power directly. This aspect of power-building is frequently expressed through ideas of “community control”, “self determination”, and “independent political power”. This power can start in small ways in our own organizations and local economies, but must also be extended to reclaim the broader economy and government.

**Connect and Assist** – catalyzes movement growth by building the connective tissue among movement strands and provides assistance of various kinds to build movement capacity. Through coalitions and networks, relationships are built across difference (racial/ethnic, cultural, and other) and solidarity is fostered across diverse constituencies.

### 3. Economic Alternatives

The third dimension features the cooperatives and community-owned businesses that are often at the forefront of conversations around solidarity economy. Ultimately, solidarity economy is no economy at all, if it does not feed, clothe, and house us and meet other needs. Many efforts are under way, such as those by the US Solidarity Economy Network and the [New Economy Coalition](#), to make visible and categorize the diverse array of alternatives that put people and planet over profit and strive to produce, consume, and exchange in ways that are more just, sustainable, and democratic.

The diagram below<sup>3</sup> is a common one used by the US Solidarity Economy. It depicts a conventional economic cycle often used for capitalist economy. But it uses different terms that emphasize a broader and more diverse set of economic activities, not just ones that are capitalist. For instance, profit (or accumulation) is named surplus. The economic cycle consists of the following sectors:

**Creation** – includes nature and culture, what humans inherit to steward for future generations. In capitalist terms, this category would be natural resources.

**(Re)Production** – includes not just things we grow and make, but also humans reproducing ourselves.

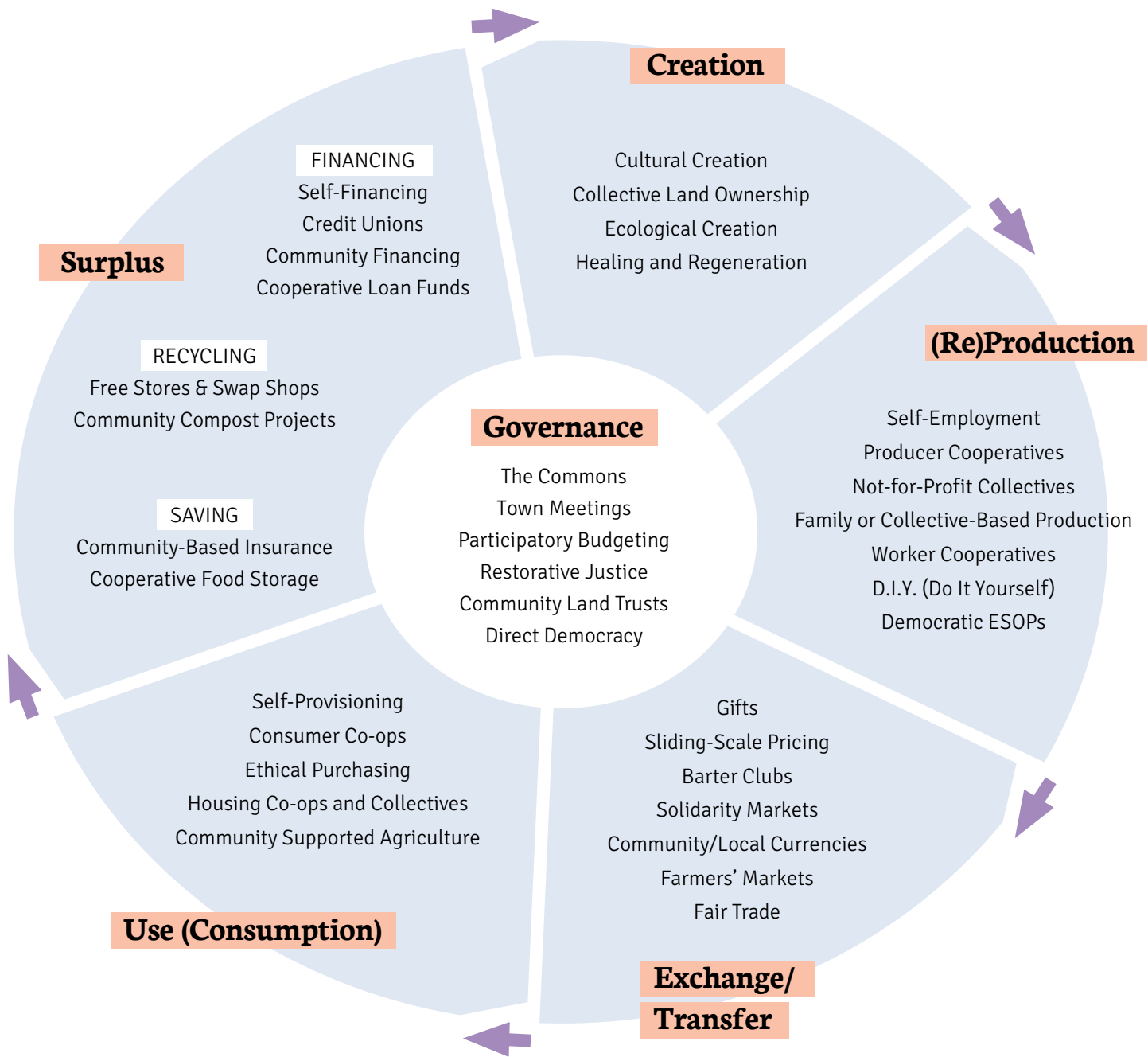
**Transfer** – includes markets of various kinds, but also non-market, non-monetary exchange.

**Use** – includes the different ways we consume to live.

**Surplus** – this is not just profit but also savings and investment (financing) of money wealth as well as other forms of surplus (such as composting and recycling).



Courtesy of YES! Magazine, Photo by Paul Dunn



## Seeing Solidarity Economy Movement in Motion

This report is an attempt to make visible the elements of solidarity economy movement that already exist. Mapping has been a common activity for solidarity economy initiatives in the US and beyond. Advanced projects in Brazil, Italy, and Quebec<sup>4</sup> have created platforms for solidarity economy enterprises to find each other and build supply chains. These maps have inspired the [US Solidarity Economy Map and Directory](#), funded by the National Science

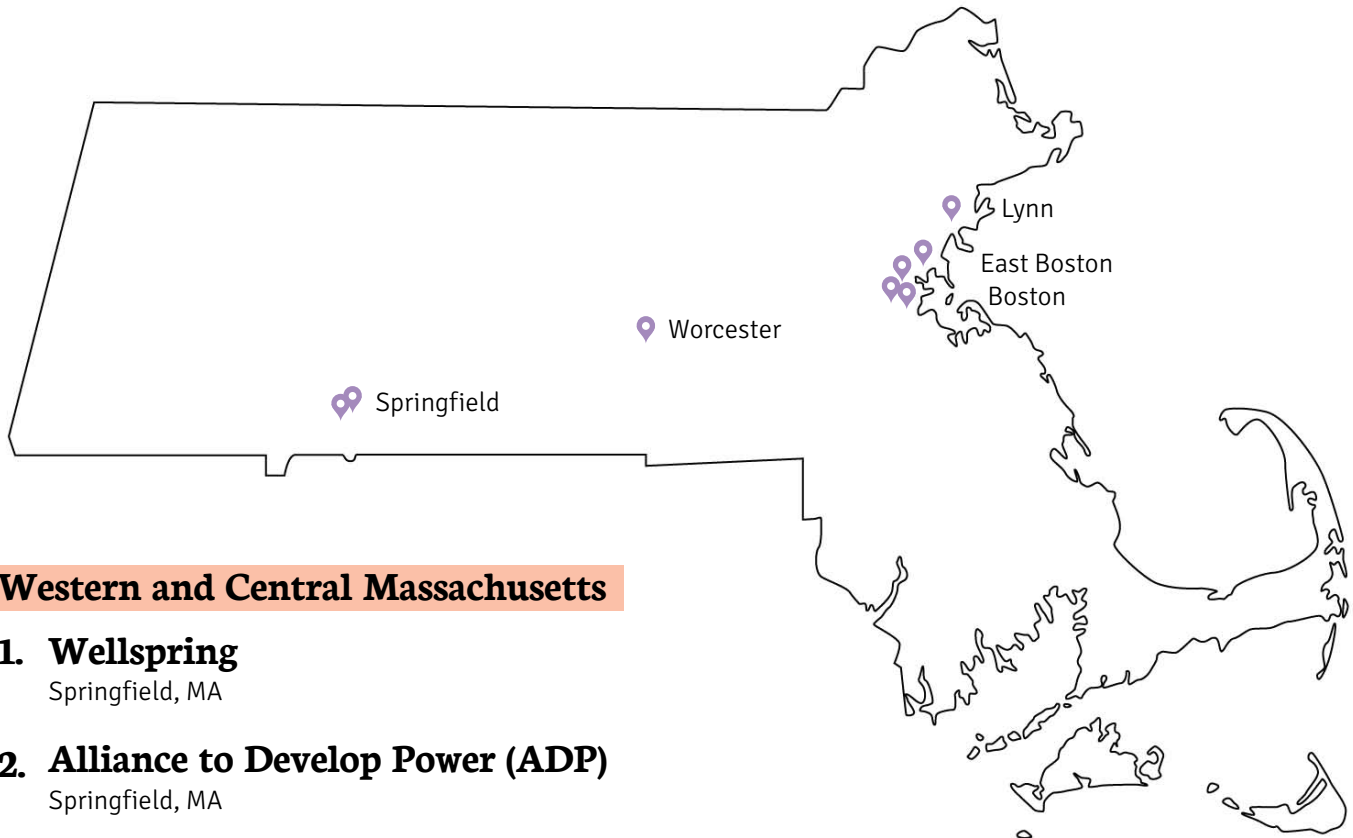
Foundation.<sup>5</sup> Led by four academics (in MA, NY, NJ, PA) and Emily Kawano of the US Solidarity Economy Network, this project has more than 20,000 entries across the US.

While these efforts are valuable and help to advance consciousness and visibility, they have limitations, not the least of which is the lack of comprehensive data. The US Solidarity Economy map, for example, has entries only for sectors where formal databases already exist, such as credit unions.

While more local mapping efforts have been undertaken, these are incomplete snapshots of a particular time and place.<sup>6</sup> Maps are often limited to entities more conventionally seen as “economic” or to initiatives that are already legally established. These maps are not intended to show how solidarity economy consciousness is growing, how power-building practices are happening, or where more informal activities are dispersed.

Given these limitations, we chose not to advance mapping efforts in Massachusetts, but rather to conduct case studies to see solidarity economy movement in motion. The case study approach enables more depth in understanding

how solidarity economy movement is happening, particularly in each of the three dimensions of consciousness, power-building, and alternative economy. We do not claim to sample all such initiatives; we know there are more out there. The first criteria in choosing our cases was that they be operating in lower-income communities of color. We developed an initial list of possible cases through previous research and the networks of our SEI members. Then we chose to sample a set of cases that were at varying stages of development, from very new to defunct. We also tried to include initiatives that spanned various types of economic alternatives and organizing models.



### Western and Central Massachusetts

- 1. Wellspring**  
Springfield, MA
- 2. Alliance to Develop Power (ADP)**  
Springfield, MA
- 3. Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance (SAGE)**  
Worcester, MA

### Eastern Massachusetts

- 4. Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity (CCDS)**  
East Boston, MA
- 5. Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network (GBCLTN)**  
Boston, MA
- 6. New Lynn Coalition (NLC)**  
Lynn, MA
- 7. CERO Coop**  
Boston, MA
- 8. Boston Ujima Project**  
Boston, MA

**Background** Founded in 2011, [Wellspring](#) is building a network of worker-owned cooperatives in Springfield to create local jobs and build wealth for low-income and unemployed residents. Located in western Massachusetts, Springfield is the third largest city in the state (~150,000). It is home to a majority people of color and suffers from high concentrations of poverty. Wellspring was inspired by the [Cleveland Evergreen Cooperatives](#), which launched in 2008 to develop worker-owned businesses to provide goods and services to the region's anchor institutions (universities and hospitals). Evergreen now has three cooperatives employing 120, including a commercial green laundry, a green energy business, and a hydroponic greenhouse.<sup>7</sup> Evergreen was itself modeled on the [Mondragon](#) cooperatives in Spain, which started in the 1950s and now has more than 200 cooperatives and affiliated businesses employing more than 74,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

With a seed grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and matching support from Baystate Health, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and others, Wellspring quickly drew interest from the major hospitals and universities in the area as a way to create good jobs. As a Vice President of Baystate Health said, "as soon as you can get people to see it's another business model that just happens to be worker-owned, that it can seed the local economy in ways that the market doesn't, that it can provide both asset building and living wages, help people to buy homes – then you can get them on board."<sup>9</sup> Less than ten percent of the \$1.5 billion

## Wellspring

Creating good jobs through worker cooperatives serving anchor institutions and communities

spent by anchor institutions in the area goes to businesses in Springfield, so Wellspring saw an opportunity to start worker-owned businesses to capture more of this spending.

So far, Wellspring has three coops in its network with another three in the pipeline. Well-spring Upholstery Cooperative was launched in 2013 and now has seven workers (four of whom are becoming worker-owners). It is just starting to achieve financial stability and develop long-term contracts, such as managing furniture inventory for Baystate Health. Wellspring Harvest is an urban greenhouse business for which Wellspring has raised \$900,000 in capital. Wellspring purchased a two-acre plot of land from City of Springfield in Fall 2016, and construction of the 10,000 square foot hydroponic greenhouse will begin early in 2017. Old Windows Workshop is a women-owned window restoration business that officially became part of the Wellspring network in December 2016. It currently employs four women, and is converting into a worker cooperative.

The network is linked together by the nonprofit Wellspring Cooperative Corporation (WCC). WCC provides technical and financial support to Wellspring coops and research and planning for new businesses. WCC strives for democratic governance through a board that includes representatives of its cooperative businesses, anchor institutions, community and labor groups, and other stakeholders. Like Mondragon, WCC plans to grow by investing the surplus from its member coops to develop more coops and create even more good jobs.



Courtesy of Wellspring

**Key Learnings** Wellspring’s focus has been on creating alternative enterprises, or in Wellspring co-founder Emily Kawano’s words, “stories of viable models.” For the workers, the story is simple. “Wellspring really does put food on my table,” says Gary Roby of Wellspring Upholstery. Nanette Bowie of Old Windows Workshop says that the business “allows the flexibility of a working mom to take care of your family responsibilities and keep a full time job.” But beyond a job, the cooperatives are giving them a new sense of ownership and possibility. Roby, who is applying to become an owner, says, “if you are going to put the title on yourself of worker-owner, you have to live up to that title.” Bowie, who had not heard about coops before joining the Workshop, says, “I have family members that didn’t know what a coop was and I had a few who are very negative. I try to reassure them that I am doing this because I have a future here.”

By focusing on building good jobs, Wellspring has created a space where people from diverse backgrounds are learning more about cooperatives and solidarity economy. According to Wellspring co-founder Fred Rose, “we can say we are trying to change capitalism, [but] lots of the people in the room don’t see it that way.” Rather “they connect with this idea that people should have some control in their lives and that we can create good jobs by capturing the purchasing power of local anchor institutions.” Kawano notes that some of the Wellspring board members “are very mainstream and not familiar with the solidarity economy.” Yet they voted for WCC to join the US Solidarity Economy Network. Kawano says, “there are probably some people who aren’t at all familiar with the solidarity economy, but it’s okay. Some people get it; some people don’t quite but are a little more open to learning about it.” WCC board member Frank Robinson of Baystate Health, says that “five years ago nobody got it... Now with the Greenhouse and Upholstery Coop as part of the business case, there is something tangible for people to respond and react to.”

A source of strength for Wellspring is its anchor institution partners. Their support lends credibility and legitimacy, which has been particularly important for gaining support from the City of Springfield. The Mayor has come to various events. However, this mainstream support has not automatically translated into resources, policies, or customers for Wellspring businesses. In the beginning, Wellspring focused on developing businesses that would meet anchor institution demand rather than the interests of coop members, which is the more traditional route for developing cooperatives, according to Rose. As Wellspring has matured, it has developed a more flexible approach to cooperative development, including the more traditional “bottom up” route.

For example, Wellspring is supporting a group of immigrant workers to create a lawncare cooperative.

Despite their progress, Wellspring still faces challenges in working with government and the broader community. When working to secure public land from the Springfield Redevelopment Authority, Rose said that they faced an attitude of “prove it to me” that their greenhouse model was viable. This skepticism and lack of understanding of the model also extends to the community, where according to Robinson, some people think that “coops are something that happen in Amherst or Northampton,” which are more white and wealthy communities.

While the vision of a network that is self-sustained by the surplus from its member cooperatives is compelling, Wellspring is still building its first coops. During this initial phase, they have found that startup is very time and resource intensive. It requires finding managers who not only have the specific business skills, but also a coop mentality. Financing the businesses is also a challenge, though according to Kawano, “we’ve been a whole lot more successful getting funding for the business than getting funding for the nonprofit.” The nonprofit WCC, which provides critical incubation support, is struggling to raise general support funds. Though it got some initial funding from anchor partners, the partners have a harder time justifying grant support over the long term, as they do not see economic development as core to their mission.

At the same time that Wellspring is getting its first businesses off the ground, it is also building up its governance structure. Robinson says, “the notion of a worker assembly that produces board members is a big concept, but from a governance standpoint we have yet to fully operationalize it.” Bowie serves on the WCC board, but while Roby would like to be more involved, his time is limited because he sometimes puts in ten to twelve hour work days. Though WCC has several board seats for community and organizing partners, it has been difficult to sustain participation from this sector, because, according to Kawano, “their capacity is pretty limited,” and they struggle just to keep their organizations afloat.

Wellspring’s progress is starting to prove the viability of the anchor institution and worker ownership model. It has brought together a remarkably diverse set of partners from community and anchor institutions and gotten the attention of key decision makers. However, more resources and investment are necessary to build out the model so that Wellspring can become “an engine for new, community-based, worker-owned companies in inner-city Springfield.”<sup>10</sup>

## Background

Based in Springfield, [Alliance to Develop Power](#) began in the late 1980s as the Anti-Displacement Project doing housing advocacy, but then shifted to tenant organizing in the early 1990s. Springfield is the third largest city in Massachusetts and also one the poorest. Throughout the 1990s, ADP organized tenants to successfully buy out their Section 8 apartment complexes, bringing 770 units of housing under tenant control at four developments. These tenant-owned developments then affiliated as organizational members of ADP.<sup>11</sup> This control of housing laid the foundation for building what ADP called its “community economy”.

By owning these developments tenants were able to control the income generated by the rent they paid as well as the Federal Section 8 housing subsidies. They also made decisions around hiring businesses to provide management and maintenance services. According to former Executive Director Carolyn Murray, at one of the first meetings after a buyout, they were reviewing the budget and “one of the members said, ‘Why don’t we pay ourselves to mow the lawn?’ And it was like a lightening bolt hit. In that moment, all the questions changed and an infinite number of possibilities became clear. And so we decided to create a landscaping business.”<sup>12</sup> ADP started United for Hire in 2001, which started with landscaping and grew to include snow removal, painting, light construction, and energy efficiency services. By 2011, it employed fifteen full-time workers, paying a minimum of \$15/hour (almost double state minimum wage at the time) and with some sharing in profits. That year, sales were \$750,000, with \$220,000 going back to support ADP.<sup>13</sup>

In creating this first business, ADP embarked on a journey to explore ways to use its assets and surplus income to

# Alliance to Develop Power

Building a community economy powered  
by community organizing

build businesses, support community organizing, and provide community services. The housing develop-

ments used some of its surplus to set up food pantries (which they called food cooperatives), run by tenant volunteers to distribute \$1.8 million worth of food each year to 1000 families.<sup>14</sup> In 2003, the housing developments also anchored the purchase of a 6,600 square foot building for ADP (and United for Hire) by providing finances for the down payment and with three of the developments holding five percent ownership each.<sup>15</sup> In 2007, ADP established Casa Obrera, a worker center that had over 500 dues-paying members by 2012.

By 2012, ADP was talking about “creating the world as it should be” through community organizing, growing its community economy, and building community. Its housing developments were valued at \$78 million. ADP had grown to a staff of thirteen with six organizers and was turning out more than 150 members to its annual convention. It was preparing to launch a series of community-owned bodegas to provide access to nutritious, affordable food and create good jobs. ADP’s story was generating excitement within its own communities and inspiring many others beyond. An organizer with San Francisco-based PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights) even said that they “aspire to be ADP when they grow up.”<sup>16</sup>

But by spring of 2013, ADP folded. It had grown, perhaps, too quickly, coming to depend more on foundation funding, which ultimately could not be sustained. Today, the housing developments continue to be tenant governed, with many of the community-building initiatives still operating (like the food cooperatives). However, ADP as an organizing entity and United for Hire are no longer active.



Courtesy of Alliance to Develop Power

**Key Learnings** The lessons learned from ADP’s rise and demise are important for those aspiring to build a transformational movement because of how they rooted their alternative economy in community organizing. For a time, ADP was able to build on the synergies between their power-building and community economic assets while navigating the considerable challenges. As former ADP director Carolyn Murray describes, “the bottom line is to build people power and economic power. I think of this work as creating the world as it should be and modeling what sustainability really is.”<sup>17</sup>

Driven by its organizing mission, ADP built a complex web of interlinked organizations and initiatives that its nonprofit anchored with organizing and infrastructural support. Each of the four housing developments were owned by their respective nonprofit tenant organizations, led by ADP members. United for Hire was a for-profit subsidiary, structured as a limited liability corporation (LLC) with the ADP nonprofit as the sole owner. The food coops were run largely by volunteers but were also supported by surplus from the housing development budgets.



*Courtesy of Alliance to Develop Power*

This organic growth was made possible by a visionary and effective leader (Murray) and by being creative and innovative using various organizational models. By doing what worked and holding true to its vision and principles, few of ADP’s initiatives had structures that were “by the book”. The food cooperatives were not consumer coops. United for Hire was not a worker cooperative in the legal sense, even though it had elements of employee ownership and democratic governance.

As ADP grew, it found that it needed to be more explicit about telling its own story. According to Tim Fisk, Executive Director from 2011 to 2013, “one of the reasons why it was so important to tell our story is because everyone had a different version of who ADP was based on how they interacted with the organization. Some people thought that ADP was just a place that brought turkeys to all of its members... Some people thought it was just this economic development model. Or some people thought that it was just community organizing. And that all makes sense.”

At its peak in 2012, ADP articulated a three-pronged strategy for its work, including community organizing, com-

munity building, and community economy. Fisk explains, “the idea behind community building in that way was that when people’s needs are met they are more able to participate in organizing, because they have the space to do it. And they are more able to take on leadership roles.”

This creation and telling of ADP’s story not only helped people to better understand ADP, but also was itself an act of shifting consciousness and articulating a vision of what is possible.<sup>18</sup> ADP’s transformational vision resonated with many community members, even those without a well-developed political analysis or previous ideological alignment. Former organizer Brendan Carey says, “we had people who weren’t into leftist politics... The Latino immigrants, when I would get to know them, a lot of times I would find out they were members of conservative political parties in their countries... And they were completely bought into the vision.” This vision became so compelling that other organizing groups wanted to pursue a similar path. Even after ADP folded, the vision persists. Carey says, “I still totally believe the vision was right. It’s just about how to get there.”

ADP experienced significant tensions holding the center between nonprofit and for-profit structures, and between power-building and building economic alternatives. One challenge was that it had to constantly organize in its housing developments to ensure that its members were in leadership. According to Carey, some “people had been living there for years. Then there were people who were new and just passing through and weren’t invested in the community and didn’t even know that it was this other thing [part of ADP].” Thus, governance over its core assets was not as direct or secure as if all the tenant groups were more formally connected to ADP.

Another core tension arose between United for Hire and the nonprofit ADP, which shared a business manager and other administrative infrastructure. As funding for the nonprofit became more constricted, the needs of the organizing program and United for Hire were increasingly at odds. According to Fisk, “we [ADP nonprofit] still very much depended on foundation money. There was only so much left over. If United for Hire had profit, that profit could be used to support organizing efforts.”

Ultimately, ADP failed because, in Fisk’s words, “we ran out of money.” ADP had become overextended, perhaps a consequence of their own success and quick growth. ADP had started to engage in statewide work with the Green Justice Coalition and in national networks such as National People’s Action, which competed with resources for engaging their local members. It got into the bodega work because it saw an opportunity in funder interest in food justice and security. When nonprofit funding started to decline, according to Fisk,

“we couldn’t whittle down the list to save our lives. Because every single one of those things was borne out of a deep need. And who was going to say which thing went away?” Carey believes “we had kind of overextended ourselves... We would literally think that this would be history and we’d be changing the economy. It made us think we could do anything.... Also, we felt like we needed to do everything, but it put us in a position where nothing could get done.”

Thus a key lesson learned was to grow more slowly and sustainably. Fisk says “if I were to do it over again, I would totally want to build the same thing that ADP was trying to be... What I would do differently is I would let the economic development dictate the speed and growth of the organization, not the funders.” Carey says, “it all could have worked if we just did things more slowly.” But, he continues, “there was this very capitalistic idea that quick growth would solve

our problems. We just had to grow forever.”

Another lesson is to build sufficient capacity across all of the enterprises. Fisk notes that for United for Hire, “on matters of insurance, liability, when it’s time to go to the bank for a loan for a truck or new equipment, there wasn’t an infrastructure in place with that company [United for Hire] exclusive of the organizing. If there was it would still exist, because the customer base is still there.”

Even though ADP is no longer, tenants still control housing, and the food coops are still in operation today. Yet, ADP’s aspirational vision remains an important example for solidarity economy movement. As Murray said, “we need to think big -- we need to stake our flag way out ahead.”<sup>19</sup> Its vision helped ADP move far beyond its roots in tenant organizing towards transformative innovations. When asked if another ADP could happen again, Fisk says, “sure...You just have to want to.”



*Courtesy of Alliance to Develop Power*



# Worcester Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance

Sowing solidarity economy vision and seeding an ecology of coops

**Background** The [Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance](#) (SAGE) was born in 2011, a re-branding of the Worcester Green Jobs Coalition that was formed in 2008 by community, environmental, and labor partners. Located in central Massachusetts, Worcester is the state's second largest city (~180,000). The alliance changed its name because it wanted to create and control green jobs rather than rely on green jobs provided by corporate capitalism.<sup>20</sup> SAGE sees itself as part of a "movement to create a new world that puts people and the environment before profit," which requires creating economic alternatives, resisting and reforming inequalities, and ending racism, sexism, and other forms of exclusion.<sup>21</sup>



*Courtesy of Worcester Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance*

SAGE is building an "ecology of coops" which includes more than a dozen emerging and established coops and coop-supporting organizations. These coops are driven by youth and adults from lower-income communities of color and progressive white residents and allies. Some coops are matching resident skills to meet community needs, such as landscaping, soil remediation, honey production, and urban agriculture. Others are providing services to movement organizations, such as translation, video production, and bookkeeping. The SAGE network also includes a worker-owned robotics company, two cooperative maker spaces, and an employee-owned union print shop. One of SAGE's current priorities is building an anchor institution strategy similar to Wellspring, starting with the creation of a solidarity economy map of the Worcester region.

SAGE is anchored by [Worcester Roots](#), a nonprofit that

is "sprouting up cooperatively owned and green initiatives for social and environmental justice."<sup>22</sup> Roots began as an environmental justice organization in 2001. It launched Toxic Soil Busters in 2005, which trains and employs youth as organizers and lead-safe landscapers and has become a youth worker-owned enterprise. Roots now houses several coops and provides technical assistance, training, and fiscal sponsorship for coops. The organization operates as a staff collective, modeling the cooperative and democratic principles it promotes.

Roots is housed in [Stone Soup Community Resource Center](#), which Roots leaders helped establish in 2006. Stone Soup is also cooperatively run. It rents space to more than a dozen community organizations, such as Ex-prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement (EPOCA), Worcester Earn-a-Bike, Stand Up for Kids Worcester, ACLU of Central Massachusetts, Worcester Immigrant Coalition, and a Food Not Bombs chapter.<sup>23</sup>

SAGE has held annual gatherings since 2011 to foster solidarity economy vision and build its network. These conferences have been as large as 200 and have included participants from across Massachusetts and Rhode Island. These gatherings have also connected local activists to the broader solidarity economy movement, for example through a video conference in 2012 with Daniel Tygell, former executive secretary of the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy. SAGE also holds monthly meetings to discuss local work on just transition, climate justice, and energy democracy, and to inform members of regional, national, and international movement happenings.

While SAGE is focused on building economic alternatives, it is also interlinked with other social justice organizing and policy advocacy work in Worcester. One of these is the [Worcester Community Labor Coalition](#) (WCLC), which fights for city policy and resources to support living wages, for access to good jobs, and for economic development that is also community development. These campaigns include leadership from some of SAGE's member organizations and have built critical alliances between unions and community. When Stone Soup suffered a devastating fire in 2009, union carpenters and plumbers donated labor, materials, and management expertise to rebuild this space, delivering a million-dollar building for about half the cost.



*Courtesy of Worcester Solidarity and Green Economy Alliance*

**Key Learnings** SAGE is part of a movement ecosystem in Worcester that is both fighting for reforms and creating alternatives. SAGE is explicit about this “dual power” approach through its principles. David Minasian of the Carpenters union, who also coordinates the Worcester Community Labor Coalition, sees “two ways of interacting with the conditions of existence. One is interacting in the systems that are there now to redirect resources to make them as beneficial to our communities as we can, like going after TIFs [tax subsidies to developers], local subsidies, and creating the jobs fund. Then there’s creating the new economy now, whether that’s the coop side or other examples.”

But that does not mean that SAGE is trying to do it all on its own. SAGE keeps its primary focus on building the alternatives. According to Matt Feinstein, a co-director of Worcester Roots and coordinator of SAGE, “in Worcester where there’s limited capacity and only so many of us, it’s figuring out where we can build the alliances so we can have the ecology where everyone doesn’t have to do everything. EPOCA and Neighbor to Neighbor can do the State House engagement. Other groups can be more focused in the youth coop arena, like Worcester Roots. But we can see our struggles as intertwined and do trainings together.”

The Worcester Community Labor Coalition exemplifies how resist and reform strategies can build “old school solidarity [that] has not only amplified our voices but increased our political power,” according to Minasian. He believes that “just working together with a campaign focus and being politically engaged with groups and individuals who haven’t traditionally worked together, that is also creating a sense of solidarity economy.”

The solidarity ties are also built through bricks and mortar projects, such as the rebuilding of Stone Soup. Minasian says that some of the union workers who volunteered on the project “are not ideologically on the level of thinking about the solidarity economy,” but they knew that Stone Soup housed many of “the folks who are working with us on a responsible employer ordinance” and that “without that community base, there would be no community to be in coalition with.” Minasian “wanted to make sure that we built community while rebuilding the community.” This idea was translated into the Coalition’s principle that economic development should also be community development.

SAGE and its leaders have been intentional and explicit about building a more racially diverse base. After SAGE’s first conference, there was a self-critique that the participants were mostly white, college-educated folks. Thus, SAGE committed to a principle of ending social exclusion of all kinds, and it has focused internally on undoing racism workshops and diversifying leadership and participation.

Roots co-director Julius Jones sees solidarity economy as a pathway to racial justice and healing that is necessary for transformation. He came to the idea of coops from reading W. E. B. Dubois and learning that many other black liberation leaders also promoted cooperative alternatives. He says, “a big part of the oppression that the black community especially, but all economically exploited communities face is lack of control over economic resources in their communities.” He believes that “you can’t get free without controlling your resources. Freedom is a solidarity state... A big part of that is healing from the damages of oppression. The economic work and redistribution of wealth and controlling the

resources of our community would be some of the healing of external oppression. The internal oppression is the emotional and spiritual wounds that happen from oppression.”

SAGE and its members draw from a culture of deep democratic practice. This is reflected in Roots staff collective and Stone Soup’s cooperative governance. When Roots first offered a Coop Academy in 2013, that program itself was also cooperatively resourced and planned. The nine participating groups each had to fundraise \$800 in order to hold the ten-week training. Groups could do work trades, and funds were also raised for scholarships.

A lot was learned from the Coop Academies and efforts to incubate coops from within nonprofits. Shane Capra, the Roots staff member who coordinated the first Coop Academy, notes that many of the participant groups “had youth programs. They were thinking about going in a coop direction. They were nonprofits, and a lot of those people are realizing that a coop wouldn’t work in their nonprofit.”<sup>24</sup> Capra further explains, given “the amount of work that it takes to start a business, [it] isn’t necessarily going to give you returns for your nonprofit.”<sup>25</sup> Stephen Healy, who was involved in EPOCA’s effort to incubate a biodiesel processing business (called Empower) says, “it’s very difficult to serve two masters, and running a business is one, and running a viable nonprofit that does advocacy work or justice work, it’s another.”<sup>26</sup> He believes that as long as Empower was still relying mostly volunteer labor, it was possible for EPOCA to manage. But if it wanted to be more than a “hobby” business, it needed to make the decision to run it like a business—and that would bring into tension the priorities of the nonprofit and that of the business.<sup>27</sup>

Nonprofits trying to incubate businesses also found they needed business, legal, and technical skills that were beyond their core competencies. The youth enterprise Drop It Like It’s Hot Sauce, incubated out of the Regional Environmental Council, found that it could not be entirely youth-driven, as there are many regulations and certifications

that required adults to complete. In rebuilding Stone Soup, Minasian found an experienced general contractor to be the lead, but who also was committed to the vision.

Despite the challenges, SAGE continues to grow organically and develop strategies for “scaling up”. Many of the efforts are small scale, and intentionally so, to ensure authentic democratic practice. For Dania Flores, a worker-owner of Access Consulting, “scale is a very North American model. Even though there is huge success in big coops, I feel that you lose that real democracy of the small scale. I worry that it might become like some unions and other organizations that are more top down.” Feinstein believes “we can go to scale by having many democratic social enterprises and coops, but I do think that we also need to have some larger ones just for longevity’s sake... that can anchor the smaller initiatives that come and go as the needs of the community change.” Roots Youth Leadership Coordinator, Sabbatina Konadu, says, “it’s like a tree. We start with the people around us, by educating the youth workers here, so they can branch out to other people to their families and the community.”

In addition to community-driven coops, SAGE is also weaving into its network established coops, like UMass Five College Credit Union. It includes Neuron Robotics, Workster, and Technocopia, which are innovation economy maker spaces that are also cooperatively run. It is also connected with WorX, a printing cooperative that is the first union coop in Massachusetts. WorX is affiliated with the United Steel Workers, which has a partnership with Mondragon in Spain.

Ultimately, SAGE’s solidarity economy journey is propelled by both vision and necessity. The rebuilding of Stone Soup perhaps sums up how the ecosystem in Worcester is advancing. According to Minasian, “it wasn’t just a visionary thing but just practical. We lacked the resources so we had to figure out how to work together to make it happen.” The lesson learned for Minasian is “you can think big and make stuff happen. You’ll be surprised by what people will do together.”



Courtesy of Stone Soup Community Center



Courtesy of Worcester Roots

# Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity

Incubating solidarity in East Boston's Latino community to fight gentrification and displacement

**Background** The Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity (CCDS) was convened in November 2015 by Latino residents of East Boston concerned about rapid gentrification. It started with a few conversations, first among a group of people displaced from a neighborhood apartment building. Then they connected with two other residents to explore how economic alternatives could help them stay in East Boston. One of those two was working on converting local restaurant [La Sanghita Café](#) into a worker cooperative, and the other was a long-time organizer and the co-founder and co-director of the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing.

Within a month, the group of five turned into a meeting of sixteen, and then quickly doubled in size again as interest grew in generating opportunities through economic alternatives. Through many meetings with residents, the idea of establishing a formal organization was generated. CCDS is now led by a provisional board of eight Latino residents of East Boston. It is focusing its efforts to support the Spanish-speaking Latino population in East Boston to pursue cooperative development. Its mission is to “provide technical, educational and organizational support to current and potential members of cooperatives in East Boston. CCDS will help develop through workers owned coops opportunities for decent work with decent pay for minority, immigrants and low-income residents of East Boston thus advancing a sustainable and permanent social and economic justice neighborhood.”

Three current cooperative-like ventures were the inspiration for forming CCDS. La Sanghita Café opened in 2014 with two co-founders. It employed eight workers until August 2016

and was in process of converting to worker ownership with support of the Boston Center for Community Ownership before it closed due to the multiple challenges it was facing. The [Eastie Farm](#) is a one-year-old farm established on a vacant lot to grow local food for local people. Established as a nonprofit, the farm is cooperatively run by volunteers and coordinated by La Sanghita. Finally, [East Boston Meditation Center](#), La Sanghita’s “sister organization,” is a space supporting health and healing through meditation and yoga. Its mission is to “make mindful practice and meditation accessible to all.” The Center hosts all CCDS meetings. In addition, some CCDS leaders are also involved in starting a soup kitchen to provide free food for families in need.

CCDS became a member of the Solidarity Economy Initiative in summer 2016. With SEI support, it developed and recently piloted a coop training series in Spanish. Twelve people, mostly women and mostly from East Boston, completed the two-week training, which met four nights a week for four hours each night. The training consisted of four modules (two evenings each): why coops, cooperative structure, business planning, and legal issues. Several resource people helped with the business planning and legal issues, but otherwise the entire curriculum was developed by the leadership team using popular education methods. Three graduates of the program are now continuing on to work together with one of the CCDS leaders to form a childcare cooperative. Two other graduates started a “women’s artisanal co-op” and began offering their products this past December as a pilot project. A few other graduates are in conversations to form a cleaning coop.



Courtesy of Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity



Courtesy of La Sanghita

**Key Learnings** The excitement among the founding members of CCDS is palpable. Luz Zambrano, a long-time organizer, East Boston resident, and staff member of the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing, says, “we started talking a year ago and now it seems like everything is aligned for coops... I feel like this moment is so important for our society to really make a change... At the same time it’s a huge challenge, because the ones we want to serve in CCDS have all these obstacles. They are poor, don’t speak the language, they don’t have documents... But I can see how people are getting excited that finally there is a light that they don’t have to be always oppressed. That they can be their own people.”

This excitement builds on a consciousness and practices that some Latino immigrants have already engaged in. CCDS board member Lilliana Avendaño, who has been in the US for three years, had studied at a cooperative university in Colombia. Another board member Indira Garmendia arrived a year ago from Nicaragua, where she was involved in issues related to inequality, particularly around gender.

Now in the US, they are drawing inspiration from other immigrant experiences with cooperative development. At the New Economy Coalition’s CommonBound conference in summer 2016, Avendaño met members of Si Se Puede (a women’s cleaning cooperative in Brooklyn) who were survivors of domestic violence like herself. CCDS invited Si Se Puede to join its train-

ing session via video conference. It also invited members of Vida Verde, a cleaning coop supported by the Brazilian Women’s Group in the Boston area.

CCDS emphasizes the importance of language and culture and the use of popular education methods in engaging its communities around cooperative development. Garmendia says they needed a training conducted in Spanish, so that it could be better tailored to their needs. Avendaño says they use popular education methods so that participants’ voices are heard and experiences valued. For her, “en CCDS, nadie es experto” [in CCDS, no one is the expert]. Zambrano further explains that popular education was necessary “because we realized that there were so many people with different levels of education and a world of knowledge that we really wanted to create a space where the experience of the people like Lilliana and other people had the same value as other people who maybe had more formal education.”

In its first step of engaging people and raising consciousness, CCDS has found it very important to stress that the reason for coops goes beyond just creating jobs. Garmendia stresses, “it was really important through the training to clarify what is cooperativism, because it’s not just about creating businesses but about developing the community. Everyone who wants to do coops really needs to be

aligned with the principles and values.” Avendaño believes “if we are really talking about the solidarity economy, that takes time because we are talking not just about ourselves. We are talking about the community. We are talking about other people. In the case of the childcare, it is not just to have a childcare, but what are we going to teach the children. Among other things, we want them to learn the principles and values of cooperativism as a way for us to help change the world and neighborhood around us.” This emphasis is needed because, as La Sanghita’s Monica Leitner-Laserna says, the “challenge really is this individualistic capitalistic model that we’re used to. Why would you share your resources, why would you live in solidarity?”

As a very young initiative, CCDS is still building its own capacity, while at the same time supporting coops and other solidarity initiatives. Avendaño is starting a coop daycare with three others who came out of the coop training. They are pursuing their childcare certification now. The new soup kitchen in East Boston came out of a CCDS member who, according to Leitner-Laserna, “saw need for people who were unemployed and hungry.” Leitner-Laserna says, “what I find really inspiring and beautiful is that at the soup kitchen, the volunteers are all low-income people helping people who are

even more low income.”

CCDS members have big dreams for their work. For Garmendia, “our goal is one day for CCDS to be sustained by the coops so we don’t have to rely on foundations and other sources so we can do what we want to do.” Zambrano sees “CCDS is not just a place where we are going to have businesses and people are going to get rich. How I see it is that this is a process of giving space for marginalized people to have their own voices, to develop their skills, find who they are, and contribute to the betterment of their families and schools, which will ultimately give residents of East Boston the opportunity to sit on the neighborhood associations and other places in the city where the decisions are made and to be able with power to say I don’t want this to happen in my neighborhood. Instead we want this or that.”

For Avendaño the vision is a transformation of life and culture. She says, “if you have a childcare where you are taking care of the children, a place where people can eat healthy food, and have a cleaning coop that cleans these places, and everybody involved has the same values, that is when we are going to see transformation in individuals, families and our neighborhood. That will help decrease the violence and will give chance for marginalized people to become powerful. That is my dream.”



Courtesy of Eastie Farm

# Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network

Governing land democratically to prevent gentrification and grow the local economy

**Background** As gentrification and displacement pressures continue to grow in the Boston region, lower-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color are looking to advance more systemic solutions. One strategy capturing increasing interest is the community land trust (CLT) model. This form of collective land ownership through a democratically governed community nonprofit takes land off the speculative market and supports community beneficial development. CLTs protect land from the pressures of the real estate market, as the land is never resold. It remains part of the commons.

In Boston, the [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#) (DSNI) established a CLT in 1988 during a period of devastating disinvestment. Now, more than thirty years later, it has become the premier example of an urban CLT, owning more than thirty acres of land with 226 units of affordable housing, an urban farm, a greenhouse, a charter school, several parks, and a town common. DSNI's nationally recognized model has inspired many other CLT efforts, including in other Boston-area neighborhoods.

The seeds of the [Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network](#) (GBCLTN) were sown several years ago when DSNI began to provide technical assistance and support to other organizations in the region interested in learning about and developing CLTs. The board of DSNI's CLT was interested in promoting the model as a community-controlled means of development without displacement. They also wanted to build political strength to develop more CLT-supportive public policies and resources. DSNI began working with other groups across Boston and Somerville who were interested in using CLTs to address gentrification and displacement and to promote urban farming.

Meetings were convened in early 2015, and the network was publically launched in spring 2016. There are now fourteen member organizations. Of the members, only one is another legally established land trust, the Chinatown Community Land Trust (incubated by the Chinese Progressive Association in 2015). The Coalition of Occupied Homes in Foreclosure (COHIF), which started in 2012 to help keep residents who are in or at

risk of foreclosure in their homes, is exploring transferring ten properties that it owns in Dorchester to a CLT to ensure permanent affordability. Other members are organizing tenants and working on strategies to address gentrification and displacement (including Boston Tenants Coalition, City Life/Vida Urbana, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Fairmont Greenway Collaborative, Greater Bowdoin/Geneva Neighborhood Association, Mattapan United, Highland Park Neighbors, New England United for Justice, and Right to the City Boston).

Several members are interested in using CLTs to support urban agriculture and open space. The Urban Farming Institute of Boston worked with DSNI and Trust for Public Land to develop a farm that will be stewarded by DSNI's CLT. It is currently working on creating their own CLT to develop and permanently own farmland in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE) is interested in securing long-term community control of land via CLT ownership of guerilla gardens that its youth have developed.

GBCLTN has pursued joint learning, provided mutual technical assistance, and is advocating for public policies and resources at the city and state levels. They have already made remarkable progress in Boston. CLTs are one of the four strategies prioritized by the Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab and were highlighted in the Mayor's 2014 housing report. GBCLTN has met with City officials to present policy recommendations in support of CLTs. They are working with the Housing Innovation Lab and Department of Neighborhood Development to develop more technical assistance for CLT initiatives in Boston. There is also growing interest at the state level. CLTs are featured as an anti-gentrification strategy in the Special Senate Committee on Housing's March 2016 Report, which recommends that the state provide seed grants and technical assistance to CLTs.



Courtesy of Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network



Courtesy of YES! Magazine, Photo by Paul Dunn

**Key Learnings** The GBCLTN is promoting a successful economic alternative that has already been well established, with more than 200 CLTs across the country. CLTs are a “hybrid” form of collective and individual ownership. The collective ownership allows the community to retain any appreciation of land value, which is due largely to public investments and collective efforts. Yet CLTs also allow private ownership of homes and businesses on the land. DSNI’s land trust features three different forms of ownership, including almost one-hundred homes owned by individuals, fifty rental units owned by a local community development corporations, and more than seventy-five units owned by a limited equity cooperative.

This dual aspect of CLTs makes them confusing to those who are accustomed to capitalist notions of private property. Yet, the ability to own your own home on a CLT also makes the concept more accessible to those in the mainstream. One of the biggest barriers to CLTs is the idea that they are a “second class” of ownership. With home equity accounting for one-quarter of all individual wealth,<sup>28</sup> it is no wonder that some in lower-income communities oppose CLTs because conventional home ownership has played such a big role in building wealth and a pathway into the middle class. However, studies have shown that CLTs not only help homeowners build wealth but also buffer them from foreclosure.<sup>29</sup>

Jocelyn Fidalgo, a DSNI land trust homeowner, says that the land trust connected her to a bank that gave her a second mortgage so she could make a down payment large enough to avoid costly private mortgage insurance (which can run a couple hundred dollars a month).<sup>30</sup> The land trust also helps her to steward her home, providing a list of contractors when she needs to make repairs. When she is ready to sell, she can sell at a price that includes any improvements she has made in the home, as well as a half percent increase for each year she has owned the home, capped at five percent. So while she may not benefit from the recent large increases in real estate value, she is building wealth that would otherwise have gone into rent. These benefits of land trust homeownership help explain why no DSNI land trust homeowners experienced foreclosures due to predatory loans in the recent crisis.<sup>31</sup>

Because CLTs run counter to widespread assumptions about private property, a priority for GBCLTN members is education to raise awareness of the CLT model and its history. Thus, members have been holding their own learning sessions, convening numerous meetings in their various neighborhoods, and connecting to the National Community Land Trust Network.

GBCLTN members found that acquiring land is one of the toughest challenges for the CLT model. In Boston’s hot real estate market, land prices are high and speculators are bidding them up even more. For instance, the Chinatown CLT has been trying to buy row houses owned by long-time families in Chinatown, but it has struggled to compete in a market flush with developers offering all cash and quick deals.

Thus, GBCLTN’s other top priority is building political power to win CLT-supportive policies and resources. Many of the members are part of the Right to the City Alliance and are campaigning for “public land for public good”. They are pushing the city and state to establish policies that give preference for land trusts and permanent affordability when selling off public land.

Organizing and political advocacy are not new for the GBCLTN members. In fact, DSNI’s land trust was a victory of the community organizing efforts in the 1980s to establish community control over development. DSNI’s Harry Smith believes that CLTs only work if they are rooted in organizing and planning efforts in the community. In addition to demands for public land, GBCLTN is also advocating for public resources to seed and build new CLTs as well as for the inclusion of CLTs in numerous affordable housing and other public funding programs.

GBCLTN is also exploring how to structure itself as a network that can support the various neighborhood initiatives and coordinate partnerships with government and financiers. In the past year, GBCLTN has hosted a meeting with banks, investors, and other community development funders, and it has held a workshop to educate city officials and agency staff about CLTs. Instead of having multiple small CLTs all operating independently, the network is exploring strategies for collectivizing infrastructure and providing shared legal, administrative, and financial resources. Some estimate that a CLT can become financially self-sustaining when it reaches 200-300 units of housing, something that would be much easier to accomplish with a set of CLTs rather than an individual CLT.<sup>32</sup>

CLTs are ultimately about building community. As Smith says, “the land trust doesn’t exist just to acquire and manage land. It’s really about engaging community to decide together what they want on their land.”<sup>33</sup> Tony Hernandez, a Dudley land trust homeowner and staffer, says that the land trust is the “bridge between the homeowner and the neighborhood... It fosters a culture of neighbors actually knowing each other. Now if you see my kid doing something they shouldn’t, then you can watch out for them.”<sup>34</sup>



## Background

The [New Lynn Coalition](#) was established in 2010 to unite the region's working class into a "permanent political and economic force [that] transcends racial, linguistic, ethnic, citizenship, and gender boundaries."<sup>35</sup> New Lynn was built on years of prior collaboration among core labor and community organizations, including an innovative machinist training program jointly run since 1995 by IUE-CWA Local 201 and the faith-based Essex County Community Organization (ECCO). Jeff Crosby, New Lynn's executive director and president of the North Shore Labor Council (NSLC), identified Minnesotans for a Fair Economy as one inspiration for the coalition, which does "what we do, but better: joint actions between worker centers and unions, working shoulder to shoulder."

Lynn is the largest city on Massachusetts' North Shore (~90,000 residents). It is one of the most racially diverse cities in the state with over fifty percent people of color and several immigrant communities,<sup>36</sup> and it has a poverty rate almost twice the state average.<sup>37</sup> Crosby describes Lynn as having been "abandoned by neoliberalism" and fears the new wave of development in the city will only widen the gap between the well off and the poor. New Lynn sees its coalition-building mission as critical to its vision of a city where "decisions are made by those impacted by them and the development of structures and institutions is based in working class interests and subject to the power of a strong working class movement."<sup>38</sup> The coalition founders identified four "fronts" of work: cultural and political education, economic development, political action, and research.

The coalition today consists of twelve core organizations, with several others participating on an issue-by-issue basis. The NSLC has been providing regular funding for the coalition through the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Fund, and provides it space in its own office. There are two part-time staffers, Crosby and Jon Feinberg, with funding recently secured from the Miller Foundation to hire a full-time organizing director. New Lynn also has a steering committee including representatives from each coalition organization.

New Lynn has engaged in several successful efforts on each of its four fronts over the last six years. The coalition created an adult night school at the Lynn Vocational Technical Institute that offered classes based on the needs of coalition member bases, such as a nanny certification course and computer classes held in Spanish. It held a political event to raise awareness about the need

# New Lynn Coalition

**Building solidarity between community and labor to fight for people-centered economic development**

for job training that was attended by 140 community members and seven local

elected officials. New Lynn also hosted a public event to celebrate Lynn's cultural diversity with over 300 community members, which, according to Crosby, had "political content" and was "very conscious, not just a party." Almost a hundred people spoke about why they came to Lynn and their vision for the city. "It told us there is a sentiment out there for unity," Crosby reflected afterward. The coalition has also supported several worker issue ballot initiatives, and lent administrative support to coalition member efforts such as the Lynn Worker Center's involvement in the Boston Globe delivery workers strike.

One longer-term effort was inspired by a visit to Mondragon. New Lynn sought to start a worker cooperative, Crosby said, to "accumulate capital" and build "substantial economic power," not just for the sake of starting a cooperative. Feinberg emphasized the significance of "an anti-racist labor and community coalition trying to build a coop." New Lynn supported the development of Freedom Machine, a worker-owned machinists cooperative. Despite the challenge of finding a large enough space for the machine shop, they had confidence in the decades of industry experience of coalition members, their knowledge of the local market, and existing connections with potential clients. Unfortunately, after four years of development, the coalition's private funder pulled out due to concerns about a lack of business and financial expertise. Crosby felt "they didn't appreciate the expertise we did have," and despite the setback the core group of coalition participants remain interested in idea.

Recently the coalition has been "almost 100%" focused, according to Feinberg, on organizing around the ongoing development of Lynn's 305-acre waterfront. Previously, the coalition had influenced a seventy-one unit residential development on Lower Washington Street. By securing funding from the AFL-CIO's Housing Investment Trust and a state tax break for the developer, New Lynn negotiated a community benefits agreement including the use of 100% union labor and \$100,000 donated to the night school. Now, New Lynn is engaging in an extended democratic visioning process across the coalition to build consensus and power to make even more transformative demands around the new waterfront development.



Courtesy of New Lynn Coalition

**Key Learnings** New Lynn’s efforts to build permanent political and economic solidarity across divisions within the working class starts with a commitment to “social justice unionism”. In contrast to business unionism, social justice unionism, according to Crosby, “starts with the analysis that there is a class struggle and we represent the working class, not just our union members, so we have to deal with all issues that affect working people.” The backing and resources of the labor council have enabled the coalition to achieve meaningful victories. For Feinberg, the stability of the labor organization gives the coalition “a certain credibility that we wouldn’t have just being a scrappy bunch of community organizations.”

A few New Lynn leaders hold well-developed analyses that explicitly identify capitalism as a system that ravaged Lynn and continues to oppress working class Lynners. However, the coalition deliberately refrains from using explicit anti-capitalist language to help “maintain a sense of credibility”, because, as Feinberg says “there are some organizations that might be scared off by that kind of language.” And while other New Lynn leaders and participants may not hold or share such explicit analyses, Feinberg reports common themes that emerge in conversation, such as positions on solidarity and community control: “We talk about community control, community-driven development, we talk about this being our city and our waterfront... language about public and communal ownership is definitely in there.” The coalition has also been cultivating an explicit racial analysis, “White supremacy, white privilege -- those are terms we use in our meetings,” said Crosby.

Crosby has observed differences in the concerns of coalition members: “Unions say the avenue to success for any family is a good job but community organizations are more concerned about housing and eviction.” Jose Palma of Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts, a New Lynn member, also noted “there are different analyses and points of view...

that’s why it’s hard to say one thing about the coalition.” But, rather than air too many discussions that might come across as “too theoretical”, according to Feinberg, New Lynn is using the imminent waterfront development to frame a collective visioning conversation. This conversation can undergird a coalition-wide vision for the city, and bolster political education and solidarity building for coalition members.

Developing this broad and united front has its internal challenges. Bridging labor and community is a challenge given historical tensions between typically white organized labor and organizations of people of color, and the disparity in resources and capacity between these of groups. Of the coalition organizations, Crosby found that “a lot of organizations are unstable. And institutional ones like unions, it’s harder to get their attention.” Despite Crosby’s ideological views and the resources NSLC has dedicated, some coalition members have questioned the nature of labor’s commitment to New Lynn. Crosby recalled a New Lynn leader saying to him, “We don’t really have unions, we have you.”

Palma observes that one challenge is that many nonprofits in Lynn “are not power-building organizations” but “service providers” that tend not to engage their communities in political education. New Lynn has also had to navigate the different and sometimes opposing political alliances of member organizations. Lynn’s mayor recently issued a series of statements regarding the city’s immigrant populations that upset many coalition members, but at least one coalition member has a publicly close relationship with the mayor.

Feinberg speculated that “most of the divisiveness that arrives is more racially based, and I think stems from both ignorance and lack of trust. But I think there’s a piece of this where you have to spend the time working together and winning and losing together to be able to see that we’re really on the same side.” Crosby also found there were tensions among immigrant populations, since there are many



Courtesy of New Lynn Coalition

different immigrant groups in the city and some are not yet represented within the coalition, and between more affluent homeowners and less affluent renters.

Some coalition members have felt that NSLC’s greater ability to contribute capacity to New Lynn activities can lead to uneven leadership and participation in their work. On the community benefits agreement related to the Lower Washington development, Palma observed that “the negotiations were not getting done by mostly community member organizations from New Lynn. That was getting negotiated mostly by Jeff Crosby and Pete Capano (a city councilor and very good friend of ours and a CWA president).”

New Lynn’s multiple fronts of work cut across the three-dimensions of consciousness, power-building and economic alternatives. The political and cultural education front builds consciousness to drive transformational work. Political action includes both internal power-building activities and engagement with local government, such as running more coalition-friendly candidates in local elections. Coalition members have also been inspired to start building political power at a state level that would be independent from the Democratic Party. Maria Carrasco, on the school board in Lynn and the President of the coalition, pointed out “I’m the only Latina elected in the city... in ten years... Something is wrong in our system that doesn’t let us obtain the political power we need.”

New Lynn’s effort to incubate Freedom Machine worker cooperative was an attempt to build an alternative. But the project exemplifies the difficulty of financing alternative models. Before the coalition settled on the idea of the machinist coop, they had explored an aquaponics cooperative, which was rejected by a funder who felt that project “didn’t meet environmental standards for waste,” according to Crosby. With the machinist cooperative, this same funder pulled out because of concerns over the lack of financial expertise among the prospective worker-owners. Despite the lack of a robust network of funders and technical support attuned to the unique needs of cooperative ventures, the desire to build alternatives persists.

Crosby sees New Lynn as “something in motion” with a “constant tension between what I think we need to be and what we are politically...” He describes a dual challenge for the coalition of being “full of contradictions internally, pushing against external things that are difficult.” New Lynn is at a place where members are “thinking grand thoughts but on the ground struggling through.” The New Lynn steering committee considered the idea of expanding their work beyond the borders of Lynn, but the majority felt that they had enough to handle within their own city. Still, leaders see the potential for a broader impact. Feinberg saw it as a first stage: “We’re trying to build something to protect what little we do have, and use that safer space to build out.”



Courtesy of New Lynn Coalition



Courtesy of New Lynn Coalition

**Background** [CERO](#) (Co-operative Energy, Recycling, and Organics; and, Cooperativa para Energía, Reciclaje, y Orgánicos) is a multicultural worker cooperative in the

waste-recycling sector. Formally incorporated at the end of 2013, CERO leapt at the market opportunity created by the 2014 Commercial Food Waste Disposal Ban on large institutions in Massachusetts, the result of past environmental struggles to reduce waste and its impacts on communities. CERO collects organic waste from Boston-area restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions that would otherwise be sent to landfills, has it composted, and then resells the compost locally for use in urban agriculture.

The idea for CERO first surfaced in 2011, a time when the unemployment crisis in Boston's working class neighborhoods was critical and the concept of the "green economy" was entering mainstream consciousness. As worker-owner Lor Holmes describes it, "the founders of CERO coop were a bunch of community folks" actively involved in two local non-profits: Boston Workers Alliance (BWA) and Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) Immigrant Worker Center. They wanted to start a worker cooperative in the environmental sector to create good, green jobs for Boston residents. In part the initiative followed up on a prior effort by BWA to incubate Roxbury Green Power, a worker-owned microenterprise for recycling waste oil.

BWA and MassCOSH were supportive of their members'

## CERO Coop

*Building a worker-owned green business,  
incubated by two worker centers*

effort. They provided meeting space and served as fiscal agent for CERO to receive an early grant in 2012 from the Barr Foundation that supported coop development training

and hiring their startup manager, Holmes. With challenges in obtaining startup financing from conventional lenders, CERO was forced to be persistent and creative in finding alternative resources. They started with a crowdfunding campaign in 2013 that raised \$17,000 from over 300 donors and also secured a zero-interest loan from Boston Impact Initiative and the Cooperative Fund of New England. These funds paid for consultants to help launch a Direct Public Offering (DPO) in summer 2014 for non-accredited Massachusetts residents to invest in CERO. A year later, the DPO raised more than \$375,000 from eighty-four investors.

The cooperative first launched with five worker-owners. They have weathered difficult periods of financial strain and uncertainty, sometimes working without pay for significant lengths of time. But as of today, according to Holmes, CERO has been "operational and revenue generating for two years", with each of the seven worker-owners and an eighth employee earning \$20/hour, and on track toward its "break even" goal for 2018. It has purchased its own trucks customized for hauling organic waste, and holds contracts with several major businesses and institutions in the area, including Northeastern University, America's Food Basket, Wegman's, the Boston Public Market, and Crop Circle Kitchen.



*Courtesy of CERO Coop*

**Key Learnings** CERO’s worker-owners hold an explicit awareness of the political-economic implications of their work. Holmes explained “We’ve got to continue to resist the injustice. At the same time we’ve got to survive, which I think means creating the kind of businesses and economies that help us to live in the full sense of that word.” The worker-owners are proud of the fact that from the beginning, the coop was driven by the worker-owners themselves. “This really is a grassroots up model,” Holmes said. “Nobody made this happen except the members.” That approach can be contrasted with other efforts (such as Evergreen and Well-spring) that first create cooperative entities and then bring in workers-owners. CERO is also conscious of the differences represented within the cooperative. Holmes described the cooperative as “Black, Brown, White, Latino, African American, queer. Everyone is choosing our multicultural workplace, choosing to bridge those differences, where we aim for raising everybody up in their power.”

The grassroots approach to development has been a source of strength as CERO has had to develop its internal bylaws and practices at the same time it is operating. The worker-owners developed a closeness throughout the process. “We all kind of fell in love with each other instantly,” Holmes recalled. And, she said, it helped that “we had a model since before we even began doing operations of holding weekly coop meetings. It’s a sacred space, nobody ever misses those meetings.” Those first years of startup development were a space for the worker-owners to learn about the cooperative structure and their own culture. Now when they hire new worker-owners the education happens “culturally, transmitting the values and talking about the principles in the context of how we do business with each other,” according to Holmes. But, she admitted, “we do have to institutionalize ways of working on this stuff.”

In financing the cooperative, CERO worker-owners benefited from the institutional credibility of BWA and MassCOSH to secure their first foundation grant. Later they were able to depend on “a terrific community,” Holmes said, in jerry-rigging a variety of alternative resources to get their business off the ground. At an early point when CERO was unable to reimburse BWA several thousand dollars for health insurance premiums, BWA accepted payment in the form of shares instead. “In that way they were definitely new economy more than old economy,” Holmes said. “They could make different things work with less rigid ways.” Their crowd-funding campaign enabled them to conduct their DPO campaign. A portion of the DPO funding went to secure a \$100,000 line of credit from the Cooperative Fund of New England (CFNE). After the DPO, a consortium of progressive lenders, including Boston Impact Initiative, the Working World, Chorus Foundation, and Access Strategies were willing to step in with additional loans for equipment



*Courtesy of CERO Coop*

and working capital. Holmes called this “a new economy loan” because “we don’t start making interest payments for a period of time, and then they’re pegged to the level of success we’re having, and there are terms for re-negotiating if we need to.”

CERO plays an important role in the Boston region as a visible and often-referenced example of an alternative to capitalism. CERO worker-owners have been generous in publicly sharing the lessons learned from their work in cooperative development. The cooperative is a participant in the Boston Ujima Project (also featured in this report).

Additionally, despite the demands of running a cooperative, CERO worker-owners have dedicated time to remaining involved in their local neighborhoods. CERO collaborates regularly with local groups like the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and is part of a local initiative to build a food hub in Boston (for which CERO would “close the loop” by recycling local food waste into compost). Holmes noted that CERO has also been active with the Boston Recycling Coalition, soon to be rebranded as the Zero Waste Coalition, to “push the city to take on a zero waste campaign.”

CERO’s ambitions go beyond being a successful waste recycling business. Looking to the future, it imagines developing an eco-energy park, in which the organic waste they collect is processed in anaerobic digesters. The digesters then produce fertilizer and biofuel to generate electricity that would open opportunities for other spin-off enterprises.

**Background** The [Boston Ujima Project](#) was launched in 2015 and is named for the Kwanzaa principle of collective work and responsibility. Ujima is an ambitious attempt to build an alternative economy rooted in solidarity and democracy at

the city level and driven by community control of capital. At the core of Ujima’s vision is an investment fund, capitalized in part by direct equity investment from local neighborhood residents, and governed and allocated through a democratic process. The project is establishing roots in two adjoining lower-income neighborhoods of color, Dorchester and Roxbury.

Ujima is led by the Center for Economic Democracy (CED), a “movement strategy and capacity building organization” which convenes local stakeholders to collaborate toward social, political, and economic transformation. Core organizational partners include City Life Vida Urbana, Boston Impact Initiative, Boston NAACP, Right to the City, CERO coop, and Boston Center for Community Ownership. Participating organizations were recruited to represent both grassroots organizing groups and solidarity economy organizations. So far, the project has been moved mostly by volunteers, with limited compensation to core partner organizations, staff organizers, youth fellows, and consultants. Recently the project secured a grant to hire full-time staff.

Ujima’s plan is to build a community fund from investments by residents and augmented by other institutional and impact investors. The process for determining which businesses to support would be weighted based on residency and other affinities rather than by the amount invested. In this way, Ujima’s fund would be democratically allocated based on community needs and aspirations rather than the interests of the

## Boston Ujima Project

Inspiring a vision of democratic local economy, starting with community control of finance

largest investors.

Other elements of the Ujima ecosystem include community standards for businesses that receive investment funds. These standards could also help drive residents to shop at these businesses and be used in cam-

paigns to secure procurement from anchor institutions. Ecosystem businesses could also share resources, such as a hub for human resources or B2B (business-to-business) lending. Ecosystem consultants could support the investment process and help businesses increase both efficiency and local impact. To close the loop, fund surplus could feed back into the ecosystem by growing the investment fund and subsidizing other community needs.

The vision of a democratically governed capital fund has inspired much interest and excitement from local organizations and community members. In August 2016, Ujima hosted a one-day Solidarity Summit to model how investments could be made. Investments from 175 individuals were matched by local impact investors for a total of \$20,000. Participants spent the day learning about five local businesses that had been pre-vetted by the project, asking the business owners questions, and voting at the end to invest the \$20,000 among them.

Over 200 individuals have participated in the project in its first year, including over twenty who are core organizers. Working groups and youth fellows have been reaching out to local community, grassroots organizations, businesses, impact investors, and other stakeholders to engage them in Ujima’s vision. The hope is to keep growing the Ujima universe and concretizing the vision and ultimately holding an assembly to ratify the structure and governance system for Ujima.



Courtesy of Boston Ujima Project



Courtesy of Boston Ujima Project

**Key Learnings** Ujima’s ecosystem approach directly addresses a major challenge for the solidarity economy movement: How can building economic alternatives challenge capitalism on a meaningful scale? Alternatives, though implemented successfully in many places, often remain limited in impact. Ujima’s strategy is to interlink community organizing, participatory budgeting, impact investment, and community-owned businesses.

Critically, Ujima identifies its core constituency as Boston low-income communities of color and has chosen to build with the grassroots groups that have already been organizing those communities. Ujima leaders representing low-income communities of color do not necessarily use the term “solidarity economy” the way that CED does, but they believe that local control and power are necessary to meet their own needs. Nia Evans, former Executive Director of the Boston NAACP, sees Ujima as responding to “regular rumbling in black communities” about the need for “economic independence, self-sufficiency, and community control...[Boston NAACP] members have been saying we need to come together, pool our resources, try a different way.”<sup>39</sup> Lisa Owens, Executive Director of City Life Vida Urbana (CLVU), explained “CLVU works in housing justice but has a broader vision for economic transformation. I’m excited about social ownership – input and control over capital in our community, so workers have a say over how work gets done, and what is being produced is meeting needs, not taking away or extracting, not introducing harmful things into the community.”<sup>40</sup>

Ujima organizers likewise come to the project convinced of the need for community control. According to 2016 summer fellow Rafael Feliciano, “the basic idea for me is, you don’t try to localize the production of the decision-making in an ecosystem in one person or group of people. Instead you collectivize as much as possible...” Another 2016 summer fellow, Kathrina St. Flavin, shared realizations she came to on her own through her work as a financial coach that led to her interest in what Ujima was doing: “I work with a lot of Haitian Americans and people who are new to America... something as simple as a susu [collaborative savings] that a lot of people do informally, it seems like it’s frowned upon because its not traditional banking. I felt a conflict, like I’m teaching my clients to conform to the system, but people are already doing things that work.”

Building political and economic power within Boston low-income communities of color is both the strategy and outcome for Ujima. For example, the community-based business standards reflect existing models such as Local First movements or the B Corporation certification, but for Ujima it is a way for community to hold accountable the businesses they invest in – a way of exercising investor power. Similarly, Ujima’s approach to anchor-based development deviates from the model popularized by the Democracy Collaborative and pursued in Wellspring and Evergreen. Rather than starting partnerships with larger institutions, Ujima’s vision is to amass community power and ally with broader movements, like Divest-Reinvest, to organ-

ize and force large institutions to shift their investments and procurement to the local solidarity economy.

A core question for Ujima is how to build out the governance structure for the investment fund. One tension is between the need to ground decision-making in core constituent groups of low-income communities of color and the desire to also allow others to participate meaningfully. Feliciano noted that “what procedures you put in place can make you feel more or less democratic.” Another challenge is that core community members have busy lives, so the process needs to allow for deep engagement without being overburdening. “People have a lot going on,” St. Flavin observed, and “being part of Ujima is going to be another responsibility.”

Project organizers have come to grasp the solidarity economy frame over time, but many newer and occasional participants can be overwhelmed by the ecosystem vision. Newcomers tend to focus on the idea of lending to local businesses, an already familiar concept to many. In fact, this component of the vision has caught the interest of many individuals and organizations that might not have otherwise participated in a political-motivated initiative.

Because of the complexity of the vision, an intensive workshop and shorter presentations have been central activities of the project. In some cases, excitement has spread to the point where organizers have reported hearing about Ujima from others who learned of the project independently and held only a partial or mistaken understanding of it. This reflects a major strength of the project - that its bold and sprawling vision has sparked widespread excitement and imagination.

Another strength is its multi-stakeholder constituency. Ujima has deliberately recruited leaders, organizers, and participants from the core stakeholder groups: community

organizations, organized labor, business owners, impact investors, and technical assistance providers. Ujima’s vision includes a bigger tent than some other solidarity economic investment funds, as it includes not just worker cooperatives but also local businesses that may be conventionally owned.

In its first year, with a limited amount of funding for operations, Ujima was able to achieve an impressive amount of work through the use of volunteer hours and by tapping local resources such as university classes and clinics. There is no doubt that the project has proceeded more slowly because of the lack of substantive funding early on to hire a dedicated staff, but several leaders and participants have remarked that the slower pace has had important benefits for the accessibility and inclusiveness of the project. It has given participants time to grasp the full vision, to build relationships and trust with people they have not worked with before, and to contribute to the vision itself.

Although Ujima initially hoped to have the startup phase be overseen by a grassroots organizing committee, it has been challenging to maintain the commitment necessary from a large number of volunteers. Ujima organizers have struggled to balance the need to make timely progress with the desire to have a grassroots, multi-stakeholder visioning process. As Ujima volunteer Libbie Cohn expressed, “it’s like we’re all on a bus, trying to determine the direction the bus is going in together. The bus has pieces falling off and we’re trying to keep it in one piece. Then there are newcomers running after the bus: they catch up, just got here, and they have to jump on and jump right into figuring out the direction.” At the very least, the development process has remained transparent and welcoming. St. Flavin feels that “there’s the opportunity for everyone’s feedback to be impactful...it would be easy to say, this is not working, so let’s try something else.”



*Courtesy of Boston Ujima Project*



# Findings

This section summarizes the key findings from across the cases, discussing each of the three dimensions of solidarity economy movement.

## Consciousness

**In all of these cases, aspirations are spreading for transformation towards a more just, sustainable, and democratic world -- the world as it should be.** These projects are driven by a vision of democratic community control of businesses, land, housing, and government to ensure that people and planet come before profit. And some groups, like ADP, are purposefully “thinking big... to stake our flag way out ahead.”<sup>41</sup> Worcester SAGE and Ujima envision building regional “ecosystems” to scale up impact.

Unlike some ideologically-driven movements, **there is no requirement that those participating in these initiatives buy into a particular theory of change in order to collaborate or support.** In fact, people are attracted from a diversity of ideological perspectives. For example, in Wellspring, there are leaders of anchor institutions who are more politically mainstream but are invested in the project because of its potential to generate jobs. In ADP, even Latino immigrants who may have been more politically conservative in their home countries bought into the overall vision. Many are involved because they are attracted to one aspect of the project, such as good jobs or being more economically independent.

Yet, once involved, there is an opportunity for participants to learn more about solidarity economy and deepen or eventually shift their own theories of change. In Wellspring, the steering committee agreed to join the US Solidarity Economy Network, creating an opening for more learning about the movement. Those who are joining worker coops, even while seeing their work as a job and the need for their business to make money, are also seeing themselves differently. They express the need to be accountable to their workmates and communities. As Sabbatina Konadu says of her experience in Worcester Roots Toxic Soil Busters, “If I’m presented as a youth worker, a coop leader, then I need to educate myself as to what I’m presented as.” And Gary Roby of Wellspring Upholstery Coop echoes the same idea: “If you are going to put the title on yourself of worker owner, you have to live up to that title.”

**In worker coops, the process of building solidarity consciousness starts as early as the business development**

**process.** A coop academy was critical to help CERO’s founders develop their vision and identity as a coop as well as their business plan. Similarly, SAGE has held coop academies annually since 2013, and CCDS launched its work with a training around cooperatives. For CERO, the process of coop education continues to this day, as they have added two new worker-owners since their founding.

**While the leaders of these initiatives can articulate a broader theory of change, many of those who are engaging do not yet hold a theory of change.** Many do not even use the term solidarity economy. Rather, they articulate the need to resist and reform the current system to better meet immediate needs. Jonathan Feinberg of New Lynn Coalition finds that “not necessarily being explicit about being anti-capitalist is beneficial” because it can help them retain credibility and not turn away “organizations that might be scared off by that kind of language.”

**The very act of bringing diverse constituencies together is an opportunity to build solidarity consciousness.** The New Lynn Coalition and Worcester Community Labor Coalition are bringing together unions and community. The union workers who volunteered to help rebuild Stone Soup did so because they saw that they would be helping those community groups that were allies in efforts to create better jobs. Ujima is bringing together businesses and investors with communities. Wellspring unites anchor institutions with community, labor, and their coops. This level of solidarity is a critical asset to building more awareness of a solidarity economy movement.

Many of the cases found that **a pre-existing capitalist mindset is a challenge that needs to be addressed.** As ADP’s Tim Fisk says “we all grew up in capitalism and there are traps in our minds.” CCDS’ Monica Leitner-Laserna says that the “challenge really is this individualistic capitalistic model that we’re used to. Why would you share your resources, why would you live in solidarity?” For some who just want a good job, a worker coop may demand more than what they are looking for. Some oppose community land trusts because they want the full benefits (and costs) of the private ownership model.

Additionally, **there is still a widespread lack of awareness of alternatives and a skepticism that they are possible, making building and shifting consciousness a key activity for many of the groups.** For example, while DSNi’s community land trust has governed land in their neighborhood

for almost thirty years, others in the region are still discovering the model and are often confused about how it works. CCDS's Indira Garmendia believes that the mind shift from capitalism to coops is difficult, even within ourselves. Lack of awareness is why CCDS is beginning with popular education around coops, with an emphasis on why cooperatives are necessary, and why ADP focused much effort to construct the story of their community economy.

**These visible models, whether ultimately sustained or not, are critical consciousness-raising resources and powerful reference points.** To overcome the skepticism, many groups place considerable emphasis on putting the alternative models into practice, as proof of concept. As Wellspring's Emily Kawano says, "we're playing our part building these stories of viable models." CERO is often referenced as a visible example of an alternative in action. ADP became an inspirational model for other organizing groups across the country. For Wellspring, Evergreen's model in Cleveland was a critical inspiration to their formation. CCDS has been inspired by other immigrant-led cooperatives and featured two of them in their coop training.

**Groups are also inspired by solidarity and cooperative traditions of the past and from other places.** Some immigrants come with cooperative experiences from their home countries, as did two of CCDS' leaders. Worcester Roots Co-Director Julius Jones looks to the history of cooperative thinking and action in black liberation movements. It is this tradition of coops in Black and Latino communities that Wellspring plans to draw upon to further engage communities of color in Springfield, where Wellspring board member Frank Robinson described there can be an attitude that "coops are something that happen in Amherst or Northampton." A number of Worcester SAGE leaders were inspired by and have connected to solidarity economy movements in South America, such as in Brazil.

**An emerging theory of transformation among our cases is the dual power approach to transformation.** SAGE's principles articulate this approach as resisting and reforming the current while also building the alternatives. Worcester Community Labor Coalition's David Minasian defines dual power as first "redirect[ing] resources to make them as beneficial to our communities as we can" and second "creating the new economy now." ADP's Caroline Murray expresses this dual approach as "moving from opposition to governance."<sup>42</sup> CERO's Lor Holmes says "we've got to continue to resist the injustice. At the same time we've got to survive, which I think means creating the kind of businesses and economies that help us to live in the full sense of that word... create the alternatives and model them and demonstrate that it's doable and keep on scaling it."

A final aspect of consciousness building is healing work. **In lower-income communities of color, psychic damage from the trauma of past and current oppression**

**can be a barrier to movement work.** These wounds, which are related to the violence and mindset of capitalism, need to be recognized and repaired. Roots Co-Director Julius Jones believes that healing is intentional work that must be undertaken simultaneously with building alternatives. He believes that "coops have capacity to create a healing space, because you have to learn to be a family member with your co-workers. You have to create a culture of acceptance and something that is more than business—camaraderie and solidarity." Similarly, CCDS has integrated healing into its work with a women's domestic violence survivor support group.

## Power Building

Power-building is integrated into all of our cases. **Each case involves contending for power, not only to win public policies and resources for solidarity economy alternatives, but ultimately to dismantle support for current systems of exploitation and oppression.** Where they vary, sometimes considerably, is in how they integrate community organizing, policy advocacy, and movement building into their work. ADP and New Lynn Coalition started as organizing groups and continue to see their main mission as building power. GBCLTN is involved in advocating for policies supporting land trusts, while many of its members are organizing to strengthen tenants rights. Ujima and Wellspring are making their first priority the incubation of economic alternatives, but that necessitates building governance structures that maintain representation of community base building organizations. SAGE and CCDS have explicitly built this dual power approach into their founding principles. CERO was incubated by two base-building groups and remains active in advocacy efforts as a member of the Boston Recycling Coalition.

**While all the groups espouse a "both-and" approach to doing reform work and building alternatives, they have had to negotiate a division of labor between the two because of limited resources to do either.** As SAGE's Matt Feinstein explains "in Worcester where there's limited capacity and only so many of us, it's figuring out where we can build the alliances so we can have the ecology where everyone doesn't have to do everything. EPOCA and N2N can do the State House engagement. Other groups can be more focused in youth coop arena, like Worcester Roots. But we can see our struggles as intertwined and do trainings together. But it is challenging." In many of the cases, it is not just that the same organizations are part of reform and build initiatives, but rather that the same people are wearing different organizational hats.

**For the cases focused on building alternatives, it has been challenging to maintain the participation and representation of grassroots base-building groups, which are struggling for resources themselves.** Wellspring would like to en-

gage more community groups but recognizes that many have limited staff capacity. Similarly, Ujima is realizing how tough it is to develop a robust governance process when people and organizations are already so busy. As Ujima participant Katharina St. Flavin noted, “people have a lot going on...[and] being part of Ujima is going to be another responsibility.”

This competition over existing capacities even extends into organizations that intentionally anchor both reform and build work. In EPOCA, the demands of its biodiesel coop, Empower, pulled people and resources away from its core organizing work. In ADP, there was a key tension between the needs of the nonprofit’s organizing work and the for-profit United for Hire. Coops that want to maintain involvement in organizing and political work have to balance that work with the demands of starting up and running a small business. Worker-owners may not have the time to engage fully when they are working long days just to keep the business going.

Yet, power-building for reform is necessary for the success of the alternatives. **Government and policy are key battlegrounds for solidarity economy movement. Supportive public policies and resources are critical to creating the conditions for alternatives to flourish.** In other countries where solidarity economy movement has been longer established, such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, and Quebec, agencies and policies have been put in place to support solidarity economy. CERO coop’s business model takes advantage of a state ban on organic waste from large institutions, which was the result of environmental struggles against new landfills and incinerators. Wellspring had to negotiate with the city of Springfield to acquire public land for its new greenhouse. The GBCLTN and its members are organizing to demand “public land for public good,” as well as public resources and technical assistance to help seed new land trusts. SAGE is interested in exploring a state policy campaign to win public funding for cooperative development, as has been recently won in New York City.

The power built in solidarity economy movement can also be applied beyond the arena of government to the private sector. For example, community power can leverage the cooperation and resources of anchor institutions. One of Ujima’s strategies is to connect to national and local divest-reinvest movements by creating a viable and attractive reinvestment framework to capture capital that is divested.

Ultimately, the business success of the alternatives is not really the end goal for these initiatives. **The broader goal is to build the power to control the economy and the government.** As CCDS’s Luz Zambrano explains, “CCDS is not just a place where we are going to have businesses and people are going to get rich. How I see it is that this is a process of giving space for marginalized people to have their own voices, to develop their skills, find who they are, and contribute to the betterment of

their families and schools, which will ultimately give residents of East Boston the opportunity to sit on the neighborhood associations and other places in the city where the decisions are made and to be able with power to say I don’t want this to happen in my neighborhood. Instead we want this or that.”

Power-building heightens several internal challenges within initiatives and the movement. **All of the cases are navigating the dynamics of race and class differences.** SAGE has been intentional and explicit about building a more racially and class diverse base, ever since an early self-critique that their first conference was mostly white, college-educated folks. Roots Co-Director Julius Jones notes that cooperatives are included in the Movement for Black Lives platform and that “in coop space, [we are] advocating for more accessibility for Black and Brown people to create coops.”

Differences have also had to be navigated between different peoples of color. For example, CERO was formed out of cooperation between Latino and African American workers. CERO’s Holmes says “we come from worlds where we haven’t had good models for having power in our work lives. We’re also intentionally bilingual, multicultural. Black, Brown, White, Latino, African American, queer—everyone is choosing our multicultural workplace, choosing to bridge those differences, where we aim for raising everybody up in their power.”

**All the cases are navigating the dynamics of power relations among organizations, many of which are non-profits.** Several are forging alliances between long-established and better-resourced labor unions and community organizations. And among community groups, some have more funding and staffing capacity while others are just trying to keep themselves going. We see a commitment across our cases to ensure representation for all groups, particularly the community groups with fewer resources, and to adhere to a democratic and transparent internal process. Nonetheless, the limited capacity of community groups makes realizing these commitments a challenge. In the best case, those partners with more resources are lending their support to those with less, such as the unions helping to rebuild Stone Soup.

**The challenge of pursuing transformational work through the nonprofit sector is acknowledged by many as a feature of the nonprofit industrial complex.** The contradiction, as described by Worcester Roots co-director Julius Jones, “is that you have to get resources from the system that you’re trying to change and then you’re trying to change the way that resources are distributed... To own the irony, we’re doing exactly what Audrey Lorde said you shouldn’t do, which is you can’t tear down the master’s house using the master’s tools.”

**A major challenge within the nonprofit sector is raising funds specifically to build capacity and support organizing.** Wellspring’s Kawano says “we’ve been a whole

lot more successful getting funding for the business than getting funding for the nonprofit.” Some groups find it easier to raise project funding than general funding, making them more susceptible to be influenced by funders’ priorities than those of their own constituents. ADP’s Tim Fisk says they developed their bodega project, not “because ADP was organizing people that didn’t have access to food... It was because food was becoming a big thing.”

**Given that much of the work happens through nonprofits, there is also a need to build organizational governance capacity, including finance and administration.** The skills and capacities necessary for operating a nonprofit are not the same as those for organizing and building community. As ADP’s Fisk explains, “I was trying to build a board that included stakeholders from the community that could independently direct the organization,” which for him included being able to analyze financial statements and audits and negotiate contracts with staff.

**Despite the challenges of the constraints of nonprofits, the initiatives in our cases are using nonprofit resources to build new institutions that do business differently.** A number of organizing groups in our cases are also developing 501c4 and other political organizations in order to overcome the strictures on 501c3 nonprofits getting involved in partisan electoral politics. The New Lynn Coalition is explicitly not a 501c3, but gets fiscal sponsorship from one, so that it can have more autonomy.

## Economic Alternatives

Our cases show that there are many types of alternatives being explored across economic sectors. Though many of these initiatives are newer or still emergent, some are literally putting “food on my table,” to quote Gary Roby of Wellspring Upholstery Coop. Among the alternatives in our cases, worker cooperatives are the most common form. Perhaps this is not surprising. Earning wages through a job is the way that many in lower-income communities of color aspire to make a living. To imagine the possibility of owning and controlling that job is then just another step.

Alternatives are also being developed beyond worker coops. GBCLTN is incubating community land trusts as a way of governing land as commons. Several initiatives feature gifting as a mode of consumption, such as ADP’s food coops and the East Boston soup kitchen. Ujima is pursuing democratic community-controlled financing for local businesses.

**We must keep in mind that the alternatives that we can build today are, by definition, transitional.** Thus, none of the alternatives that are being developed now should be expected to simply outcompete current capitalist institutions. Rather, they are the prototypes and sprouts for future developments and transformation. Alternatives are being

developed where existing needs are not being met (such as the numerous coops sprouting in Worcester), new market opportunities are arising (such as CERO’s organic waste business), and where community power can be brought to bear to reorganize markets (as in the anchor institution strategy or taking land out of the market for land trusts).

**There is a diversity of ways that worker coops are emerging.** Many are being formed to meet community needs, both in terms of providing goods and services as well as creating good jobs for residents. SAGE and CCDS are incubating coops to provide food, childcare, and landscaping. ADP’s United for Hire provided housing and landscape maintenance and construction. **Some are strategically orienting themselves to meet existing market demands in the regional economy.** Some of Wellspring’s coops are designed to provide goods and services to the region’s universities and hospitals. CERO is providing recycling and organic waste services to both community businesses and anchor institutions.

**Worker cooperatives are also arising from conversions of existing businesses and partnerships with unions.** Wellspring’s Old Windows Workshop is an example of a business that is converting to become a coop. In Worcester, the WorX Printing Cooperative is a worker-owned union print shop, affiliated with the United Steelworkers. The New Lynn Coalition also explored the union coop model in its attempt to incubate Freedom Machine Coop.

Ujima presents another idea for growing economic alternatives – **the creation of a community-controlled capital fund.** Ujima’s financing will be made available not only to cooperatives but also other locally-owned small businesses. All of the businesses that receive investment must be certified as meeting community standards in terms of how they treat workers, community, and the environment. Ujima’s business certification will not only help to build a pool of customers for community businesses, but also help to build solidarity ties between local businesses and their communities.

The solidarity alternatives also include initiatives that involve collective governance of land and housing, as well as gifting. ADP’s community economy began with tenant ownership and control of affordable housing developments. DSN1’s land trust governs more than thirty acres of land for long-term public benefit. More than 226 units of housing are now on the CLT, including privately owned homes, nonprofit rental units, and cooperatively owned housing. Each of ADP’s developments sponsored “food coops” that are volunteer-run food pantries and funded by surplus. This system of exchange is a form of gifting. Similarly, in East Boston, a new soup kitchen has just opened, where according to Monica Leitner-Laserna, “the volunteers are all low-income people helping people who are even more low income.”

These alternatives all coexist alongside conventional

capitalist institutions. In some cases, these solidarity businesses compete in markets against other capitalist businesses. In other cases, they control resources won through organizing and policy advocacy. But in all cases, **solidarity enterprises rely on power-building strategies and allies to help create more resources and opportunities for them to succeed.** ADP's organizing of tenants resulted in winning ownership of their housing. DSNI's organizing won control over land and the power of eminent domain to take privately owned land. In Lynn and Worcester, community benefits are demanded from new development, in order to fund community development, including solidarity alternatives. The organic waste market that CERO now serves was created by past political struggles in Massachusetts over solid waste.

**To succeed, these alternatives have had to innovate and take unconventional approaches to business development.** They are finding ways to get the job done out of necessity. Tim Fisk likens ADP's organic growth to an old colonial home: "You look at it from straight on and it's just this square. And then you look at it from the side, there's an addition and then an addition behind that and an addition behind that. There's no overarching elegant architecture to this structure, because it had been added to over so much time." In all cases, **nonprofits are part of the ecosystem, providing incubation resources, doing the base building and organizing, and doing the research and development to support new models.**

The rebuilding of Stone Soup for half the million-dollar cost was achieved because the community need was urgent and political allies stepped up to help. Even though they did not follow conventional wisdom for development projects, such as having plans finalized and funds secured beforehand, they dreamed big and put the pieces together, doing enough fundraising for each step of the process.

**Financing is one of the most difficult challenges for these alternative models.** Because many of the initiatives found it difficult to access more conventional sources of capital, they sought out alternatives. CERO started with foundation grants for business planning and development. They then conducted their own crowd-source fundraising online through Indiegogo and raised the funds to do a direct public offering, which raised \$370,000 in startup capital. These funds were then matched by solidarity investors (Boston Impact Initiative and The Working World) and foundations (Access Strategies Fund and Chorus Foundation).

Despite these successes in the bootstrap development approach, there remain a number of challenges posed by constrained resources and barriers to capital. First, **the incubation of new cooperatives is very intensive and difficult.** Startup requires dedicated time and funding, including plenty of sweat equity and labor of love. CERO needed more than two years after its coop academy to raise funds and start operations.

Wellspring got a running start with a large foundation grant and some matching funds from a few anchor institutions. But sustaining the nonprofit that supports coop development remains a challenge. In Worcester, the numerous startup coops are all still fairly small and most have yet to grow to a scale beyond a "hobby" business. Freedom Machine coop in Lynn fell through after a number of years of development when the individual funder decided to pull out.

Another challenge is that these initiatives require specific skills for managing businesses as well as expertise in the specific industry. But it is not as simple as hiring an expert or manager. These managers must also share in the cooperative values. In the Wellspring Upholstery Coop, the manager is a long-time upholstery owner who is nearing retirement. The Stone Soup rebuilding project was managed by an experienced general contractor who was bought into the mission.

**The anchor institution strategy, while promising a steady base of customers and perhaps other kinds of support, also has its challenges.** As Wellspring's Fred Rose learned, a challenge with this model of coop development is that the work is defined by anchor demand rather than the interests of coop members. Also, anchors do not see their core mission as economic development, so when Wellspring went back to them for more resources after the initial grants, "it was, 'what are you doing to meet our missions?'"

**A persistent challenge in doing the alternative building work is the tension between organizing and business.** While ADP achieved a remarkable synergy between organizing and economic control, this tension started to work against them when choices had to be made between funding the organizing versus investing in the business. Some organizing groups believe that business success can eventually fund their nonprofit work. But the experience of incubating coops from nonprofits shows that it is very difficult to start a new business and that, at least in the short term, it is unlikely that a new coop will be able to generate enough surplus to also fund the organizing.

# Recommendations and Conclusions

Our cases show growing aspirations and attempts to build and live in the world as it should be, rooted in lower-income communities of color across Massachusetts. There is an emerging movement for solidarity economy. At their best, these efforts are:

- **Driven by community need**
- **Building solidarity across a spectrum of political perspectives and sectors**
- **Inspiring collective dreams of the world as it should be**
- **Building power to govern and control political and economic resources**
- **Resisting and reforming the current, while building alternatives that can exist now**
- **Innovating alternative economic strategies and vehicles that combine nonprofit and for-profit approaches**

By seeing solidarity economy as a movement in three dimensions, we can assess its growth and the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead. To recap the three dimensions: Consciousness is the intent to transform the world into what it should be and recognizing that we can build from practices that are already in place. Building power creates the means to realize the vision through

politics, policy, and government, but is also a fundamental capacity for creating alternative economic institutions. Economic alternatives attempt to meet our needs today and model ways that go beyond capitalism and are also a source of political power.

All three of these dimensions move simultaneously, though not always in the same proportions. There are distinct activities that focus more on one or another of the dimensions. These dimensions are sometimes thought of and worked on separately. For example, some see power-building only in organizing for policy change, consciousness building only in popular education and healing, or alternatives only in worker cooperatives. But we separate these dimensions at the expense of losing transformative potential or missing opportunities for wider and greater transformation.

We all have a role to play in building solidarity, whether we see ourselves as workers, residents, organizers, entrepreneurs, owners, activists, artists, healers, funders, or allies. SEI focuses on the efforts in lower-income communities of color because these are our communities and where we see many seeds sprouting, but solidarity economy movement is growing in many different communities and sectors. For all who share the dream of transformation to a solidarity economy, we hope this report provides useful frameworks, evidence, lessons learned, and inspiration for the work that lies ahead.

We conclude by offering some recommendations for building solidarity economy movement:

## **See solidarity economy holistically, as a transformative social movement.**

Transformation is not going to happen just by planting the seeds for new coops. There are toxic pesticides and concrete in the way that have to be resisted, reformed, and removed. We also need to plough the ground and fertilize the soil of consciousness so that the economic alternatives can take root and sprout.

## **Be open to the diverse and organic ways that solidarity economy movement can emerge and progress, particularly those that are driven by need.**

Our cases show there are many organizational forms, arising from many different origins and from a variety of ideological perspectives. Part of overcoming a capitalist mindset is remaining open to possibilities even against what can seem like overwhelming odds. When there is deep need (to feed families, create jobs, care for one another), there is the possibility for innovating new pathways. These initiatives can emerge from various sectors, such as social service, organizing, policy advocacy, small business, housing, and finance.

### **Be willing to innovate and be prepared to fail forward.**

We need to learn from our practice, and in particular from failed attempts. No efforts are going to be pure examples of solidarity economy values. All are, to an extent, making the road as they walk. As long as public policy and resources are tilted towards exploitive capitalist businesses, solidarity alternatives are not going to simply outcompete capitalist markets. Thus, many solidarity businesses and campaigns will fail. These failures, though, represent assets for the future, if we reuse and repurpose what worked and keep the dream alive. Even though ADP is no longer, its vision still inspires many.

### **Take an ecosystem approach to building and scaling up solidarity economy movement.**

A single organization or initiative cannot do it all and cannot transform the current system on its own. Both SAGE and Ujima envision building an ecosystem of interdependent initiatives in their respective locales. This ecosystem approach also offers a solution to the dilemma of scaling up. We often get trapped by capitalistic notions of scaling up through ever-larger enterprises that grow exponentially. But scaling up can also happen with many smaller and locally controlled initiatives all linking together, the way that viral messaging can spread quickly and expansively.

### **Support infrastructure for organizing and incubation.**

All of these efforts have emerged from an incredible amount of dedication and sweat equity. But those who are organizing and building power at the grassroots and starting up alternatives are not alone. In all of our cases, there are organizing and technical assistance resources provided by existing entities, mostly nonprofits. Despite the tremendous constraints on the nonprofit sector to do transformative work, they are redirecting resources and using the “master’s tools” to build vehicles for the solidarity economy. Funders can play a critical role in supporting these nonprofits that are part of the solidarity infrastructure. While necessity is the mother of invention, with too few resources, good ideas can never take root. General grant support is necessary to give initiatives some running room to experiment and build the vision.

### **Inspire and connect initiatives across sectors and communities from local to global so that we can learn from one another and scale up.**

Many of these efforts were inspired by examples from near and far. Living models, even if not perfect or ultimately sustained, are tangible reference points that expand the boundaries of the possible. Infecting people with the dream or desire of a different world is a prerequisite to building power and creating alternatives that can transform systems. Connecting these initiatives not only helps to build movement power, but also allows for collective learning and innovation. Connections can happen in a very local space, as in Stone Soup being a place for multiple community organizations to mix and deepen relationships. They can also be trans-local, such as connecting with networks and movements in other parts of the US and the world.

### **Join up a transformative vision with *resist, reform, and survival* efforts.**

Too often, we go only for the “winnable” in our resist and reform campaigns. We critique the structural roots of a problem, but then only aspire to win band-aids or incremental solutions. While these reform efforts are necessary and help make life better and mobilize many people, we need to spark transformative aspirations through this work. Even if we cannot win the transformative demands today, we have to put out a vision of where we want to go. So for instance, a community benefits agreement is not an end in itself, but a step towards controlling and governing development in the first place. But the resources from such a win can be used to gain more control over land and the surplus generated by development. Similarly, there are many practices in our communities that people see simply as survival. We need to lift up these modes and connect them to a solidarity vision.

### **Build the solidarity finance sector, with funders and investors who see themselves as part of, and not apart from, the movement—as Solidarity Funders.**

When funders see themselves as separate from the field, they can be like doctors who do not diagnose the problems with their patients. According to Worcester Roots Co-Director Julius Jones, “if they don’t do a proper intake, then they end up treating a problem that isn’t there or creating a new problem. Funders should come in as co-doctors with community organizers.” As stewards of pooled surplus, funders are not only gifting to transformative initiatives, but also helping to build solidarity finance. Some are already using mission and program-related investments to make an impact beyond grants. Others are funding 501c4s and other vehicles that can go beyond the strictures of 501c3 funding. As part of the movement, funders need to ask themselves not just how to give grants and invest, but also how they can contribute to more democratic allocation of surplus through their own operations and governance.

# Acknowledgements

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## More Resources

Here are some articles, books, and websites for further information on solidarity economy.

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- Erik Olin Wright's Envisioning Real Utopias web page: <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ERU.htm>
- Solidarity NYC: <http://solidaritynyc.org/>
- US Solidarity Economy Network: <https://ussolidarityeconomy.wordpress.com/>



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996) and *A Postcapitalist Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
- <sup>2</sup> See Jessica Gordon Nembhard's *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (Penn State University Press, 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Figure adapted by Libbie Cohn from Ethan Miller, "OCCUPY! CONNECT! CREATE! - Imagining Life Beyond "The Economy" (part seven)," GEO 10, Grassroots Economic Organizing (October 2011). <http://www.geo.coop/node/729>
- <sup>4</sup> See Craig Borowiak's Solidarity Economy Resources website's page "Other Mapping Initiatives": <http://cborowiak.haverford.edu/solidarityeconomy/mapping-initiatives/other-mapping-initiatives/>.
- <sup>5</sup> See <http://solidarityeconomy.us/>.
- <sup>6</sup> See Mira Luna, "How to Map the New Economy," Shareable, March 12, 2013. <http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-to-map-the-new-economy>
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## **Solidarity Rising in Massachusetts:**

How a Solidarity Economy Movement is Emerging  
in Lower-Income Communities of Color

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