



Board Candidate Statements 2018

Candidate name: Brel Hutton-Okpalaeke

Nominated by: Madison Community Cooperative

Part I: Personal Data & Statement

Brel Hutton-Okpalaeke has been a member of Madison Community Cooperative (MCC) since 2014 and served on MCC's board of directors, as a Maintenance officer, on the United People of Color Caucus, and now as the staff Maintenance Coordinator for the past 2½ years. During that time he has helped coordinate the rebuild of Lothlorien Cooperative, and many other major renovations in MCC, along with a major staff restructure. Brel has been an active participant in NASCO, serving as treasurer for NASCO Development Services (NDS) and on the NASCO Properties (NP) board.

Brel's main goals in running for the NASCO Board are to keep the ball rolling on the NDS/NASCO merger, to increase clarity of NASCO's activities to member coops, to make engagement with NASCO an easier, more appealing process, and to promote cooperative development with the support of the co-op community.

Outside of Housing coops, Brel spends weekends teaching a free build-a-bike class with the Madison Freewheel Bicycle Co., a nonprofit community bicycle shop that is run as a worker-owned cooperative in the Madison area. www.freewheelbikes.org.

Part II: Questions

Why are you involved in co-ops?

I'm involved in cooperatives because I find them to be the best way for humans to live in the world. They Foster camaraderie cooperation and sustainability and Empower their members to make substance of change both within their immediate community and their communities at Large. I think coops are a valuable Assets in the war against exploitative capitalism and I want to give all that I can to bolster these bastions of resistance in North America.

What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?

NASCO serves as one of the primary entry points for people into the Cooperative housing movement. For NASCO to be successful long-term, I think that we will need to look to the original reasons that caused us to organize in the first place and make sure that we are doing those things as well as we can be, and when we take on new tasks, to evaluate them in the context of our mission and strategic plan.

Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

I believe that the thing that I can do most effectively and am most excited about is to reach out and bring the voices of diverse members and their needs to the board. I want to make sure that NASCO members both know what NASCO is and how they can contribute their ideas, experiences, and energy to our shared goals.



How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?

I fairly regularly participate in discussions about coop development in my home coop of MCC and have traveled to Chicago and Boulder to get a better idea of what coops there are trying to do and lend my energy to their causes. I would continue to do this as a board member and bring back those experiences and perspectives to the NASCO board.

Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?

I want to help make participation within NASCO more accessible and understandable to our members. I want to work on ways that we can develop best practices for cooperative housing communities, and I want to develop strategies for how we can grow The Cooperative movement through new Cooperative development.



Candidate name: Nola Warner

Nominated by: MSU Student Housing Cooperative

Part I: Personal Data & Statement

Nola Warner has been Member Services Coordinator for MSU Student Housing Cooperative (SHC) since 2015. She supports Membership and Education Committees in their initiatives, particularly around conflict resolution, consent, diversity and inclusion. As professional office staff, she also meticulously tracks member data and accounts receivable. She has prior cooperative living experience through the Kalamazoo Nature Center Student Environmental Co-op, the Wesley Intentional Living Center, and other group living scenarios.

For six years, Nola worked for the Kalamazoo Peace Center, where she mobilized students and community members on issues of peace and justice. In her two years as Co-Director, she gained skills in facilitation, budgeting, event organizing, fundraising, and grassroots activation.

She currently serves on the Board of the Peace Education Center, a hub for activism in the Greater Lansing Area. She manages their website, social media, and some communications. She is currently part of an effort to organize a Michigan Peace and Justice gathering to invigorate a multitude of groups to work together on issues.

Nola has a deep passion for wilderness and has logged over 200 miles of hiking in 2017. She is in love with her husband, Scotty, and their dog, Darla. She loves comedy, sustainability, and thrifting.

Part II: Questions

Why are you involved in co-ops?

Cooperatives provide a viable, community-driven alternative to an economy that tends to serve corporations rather than yourself or the folks around you. I am proud to be a Cooperative employee, where I know my day-to-day work is a cherished and vital part of what we provide : affordable, intentional community housing to 250 members. My involvement in cooperatives adds value to the greater movement, which I hope continues to grow larger daily.

What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?

- I envision NASCO coordinating greater resources of its members towards expansion and invigoration of the movement. During the past two years, I have built relationships through NASCO Staff & Managers, Association of Cooperative Educators, Mid-America Cooperative Council, and Building Michigan Communities Conference. Although I am confident NASCO already has strong connections with regional, national, and international cooperative networks, building stronger bridges would be part of a future towards which I would contribute.
- Expansion of the Member Resource Library, possibly stronger collaboration with existing libraries such as cultivate.coop, additional member-training opportunities, and increased skill-sharing among cooperative members and staff are integral to furthering the success of NASCO's cooperative education.



Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

- I can contribute through facilitation skills, strategic planning experience (after being part of a large cooperative), and overall organizing and stewardship of the Board. I also feel confident in giving guidance to and providing oversight of NASCO staff and programming, as I have become more familiar with it over time. With my current cooperative involvement and skillset, I would be proud to be a Director of the Board.
- NASCO specifically calls for the skillsets and perspectives of professional cooperative staff, which I am. Also, I've presented at NASCO Institute, and plan to continue to attend NASCO conferences and contribute. I have gained knowledge on a myriad of questions and issues that concern many of our co-op members: from Fair Housing, conflict resolution, anti-oppression and systemic racism to consent culture, internal grievances processes, mental health and wellness issues.
- I have experience in teaching, facilitating, building consensus, and conducting trainings.

How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?

- I am able to contribute to the organization outside of Board Meetings by networking, staying in contact with other Board Members, keeping initiatives going that are decided at Board Meetings, and making sure things progress in a reasonable manner. SHC supports me as full-time cooperative staff person, and I am confident in my capacity to fulfill all the specific commitments listed, as well as provide supplemental member training in specific areas.
- One variable that plays a role in my involvement is my current journey into motherhood. After April 2018, I will begin to navigate my life as a parent, and may have difficulty traveling at first. After maternity leave, I plan on entering back into work and fulfilling commitments as made.

Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?

- I would like to work on mobilizing the energy and resources of NASCO to build a greater cooperative movement. NASCO has many assets and skillsets through its members and its allies, and an ability to coordinate them to our collective advantage. I would be thrilled to create or expand our greater networking abilities to member co-ops as well as the greater cooperative movement.



Candidate name: Nick Coquillard

Nominated by: Inter-Cooperative Council at the University of Michigan

Part I: Personal Data & Statement

I apply to join a remarkable group of people committed to social justice, community, and cooperative values in order to contribute my more than 20 years of experience as a student affairs, affordable housing, and student housing cooperative leader and executive.

I have partnered with the entire Inter-Cooperative Council since 2013 as its General Manager in full support of NASCO's mission, including active participation on NASCO Development Services Board - serving as its VP for the last three years (and participating on the Inclusion and Personnel Committees). Before that I spent more than six years in student affairs-related college positions at Michigan State University, in Cleveland, and in Albany, NY. I then worked for more than 13 years in New York City in nonprofit management, including directing large homeless shelters for persons with mental illness and substance abuse.

I bring a unique combination of non-profit management and student-related experience to serve NASCO and to meet the goals outlined in our strategic plan, which I participated in creating. Most importantly, I hope to positively supplement the Board's amazing, heart-felt work with my experience and passion. I would consider it an honor to be a NASCO Board Member.

Part II: Questions

Why are you involved in co-ops?

I choose to be part of this remarkable movement so that we may continue to strengthen existing co-ops, grow leaders, build communities that result in life-long connections, and have affordable housing options so that all persons that want to complete a higher level of education can.

Specifically, I serve and partner with the co-op movement to ensure we support a safe, financially sound organization where aspiring co-ops and social justice advocates grow their individual and collective selves and learn how to build and maintain communities.

My greatest joy comes when I work with member leaders and leaders of other co-ops to work through conflict, partner to maintain cooperative systems, and evolve how we best support our members.

As for my interest to be a NASCO Board Member, I truly and passionately want to be on the NASCO Board to share my skills and passion with more people and to support this amazing organization. One other reason I have is that I believe that a handful of more experienced members on our Board will strengthen us and allow us to leverage all levels of our membership.

What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?

My vision is to work within NASCO's mission and vision by working closely with the staff collective primarily, and other co-op members secondarily, to engage our strategic plan, grow co-ops, and



to realize a social justice-based voice to impact specific elements of real change. NASCO is the leading U.S. cooperative organization full of young (in age and in heart), positive, visionary members who stand ready to drive our much-needed recommitment to social justice, human respect, anti-oppression work, and economically just strategies in our country. I believe NASCO can improve our world in these areas by working from co-ops-outward and this requires a passionate, focused Board.

Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

I bring a positive, adaptive, growth mindset with years of non-profit experience to supplement and help advise our movement and leaders. Specifically, I aim to leverage my budgeting, team building, board participation, human resources, financial planning, leadership development, project management, and other skills to inspire and engage our great ideas and to support us when we face challenges. I consider myself a co-op-er who is able to work through adversity to help us focus on our agreed upon goals and to bring results.

How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?

At the ICC-Ann Arbor, I have a remarkable staff team, executive leaders and Board who support me so much. I have the support and the skills to balance my work and family life in order to partner between our Board Meetings – where the real work needs to happen in committees and with the staff collective. In my more than 3 years of NDS Board experience, I have proven to be a very active, light-hearted, intentional member who has helped support NASCO staff and other co-op directors and leaders to stay connected and reach the goals we set at NDS and the Inclusion and Personnel Committees.

Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?

I believe we are in a time of evolving cooperative systems. We continue to develop and support co-ops in ways different from even 8-10 years ago. I partner with more than 550 members at the ICC-Ann Arbor to work on our adapting how we support our members and make space for growth, respect, social change and personal change, and I can help bridge this gap. Another area of focus is helping NASCO and other co-ops create survivor-centered sexual assault & harassment policies.



Candidate name: Christopher Bell

Nominated by: Waterloo Cooperative Residence Inc.

Part I: Personal Data & Statement

My name is Chris Bell, and I am a 23-year-old pursuing my master's degree in urban planning at the University of Waterloo. I am originally from western Canada, growing up in Vancouver and Calgary. In June 2017 I graduated with a BA in Urban Studies from the University of Calgary. I am also member of the Board of Directors at Waterloo Cooperative Residence Inc. (WCRI), a proud NASCO member organization.

Before moving out east and joining WCRI, I was active with a wide variety of youth- and student-led organizations from the local to the global scale. In 2015 I founded Young Calgary, a grassroots "think-and-do tank" focusing on local youth issues in my hometown. Through research and engagement, we identified and advocated for policies to improve young peoples' access to housing and transportation services.

I am running for NASCO's board because I believe in the importance of providing high-quality, affordable, and secure accommodations to students and other populations. I want to contribute to NASCO's work supporting democratic, student-owned housing co-operatives, and I feel I have skills and qualifications that could be assets to the organization.

Part II: Questions

Why are you involved in co-ops?

Ensuring that students, and all populations for that matter, have access to secure and affordable housing is a growing challenge for North American communities. Housing co-operatives, with their unique democratic management style and focus on community engagement, are one of the best solutions to this problem I believe.

What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?

My vision for NASCO within the co-operative movement is for the organization to serve as both a convener and a catalyst. Since 19xx, NASCO has convened member co-operatives to foster a broader sense of community, and to help spread good practices. In recent decades as well NASCO has, through subsidiary bodies, acted as a catalyst to leverage the capital of member organizations, providing a vital 'missing link' among housing co-operatives that facilitates resilience and expansion.

Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

I believe I can best aid NASCO in its mission through my skills and knowledge of board policy and governance broadly, as well as my understanding of the land development process. Through previous volunteer and professional work I have developed knowledge of organizational governance practices; through my education and experience as an urban planner, I am familiar with the process of bringing real estate projects from concept to reality.



How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?

I can contribute to NASCO outside Board Meetings through by conducting research in relation to discrete projects, and make necessary recommendations. As a graduate student I have a fairly flexible schedule, and my only other major commitments other than NASCO would be course-work and thesis-related research, and of course serving on WCRI's board concurrently.

Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?

I would like to work to support NASCO's ongoing work to support member organizations' redevelopment efforts and projects.



Candidate name: Camryn Kessler

Nominated by: University of Kansas Student Housing Association

Part I: Personal Data & Statement

My name is Camryn Kessler and I am the current NASCO Active Member Representative (AMR). I was elected to the board at Institute last year, and have been serving consistently ever since. As AMR, I have been a member of the Membership Engagement Committee and the Executive Committee in addition to fundraising over \$650 for the Low-Income Scholarship Fund for NASCO. As AMR, I have also been working with staff to create a plan to better connect board members with member co-ops. Additionally, I am a member of ICC Austin, and have been for three years, where I have been an officer in charge of labor and membership. This summer, I worked for UKSHA as their Community Engagement Intern. I am also a student at the University of Texas at Austin, where I study Urban Studies and Real Estate Finance. I use these disciplines for my board work, as I focus on affordable and equitable housing. I am currently in the midst of writing my thesis on bringing cooperative housing to conservative Texas cities.

Part II: Questions

Why are you involved in co-ops?

I got involved in co-ops originally to find a community in a new city. When I first moved to Austin, I moved into a co-op in order to meet new people, and have affordable housing close to campus. Co-ops inspired me so much, they caused me to change my area of study and to dedicate my life to them. I believe that cooperatives are the future of affordable housing, and I am working to make this a reality; after I graduate, I plan to pursue a graduate degree to focus more closely on cooperative housing.

What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?

NASCO should be an active part in the cooperative movement by educating current, potential, new, and old co-ops on how to better spread the movement, and to support existing and new co-ops. Co-ops particularly in the South and particularly larger co-ops have felt like NASCO is not supporting them as best as they can but I believe their needs are important to address for the long-term survivability of NASCO. As someone who is a member of both a Southern co-op and a large co-op, I feel like I can bring this perspective to the board.

Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

I can best aid NASCO in its mission in several ways. First, I am someone who still lives in a co-op, specifically in a large, Southern co-op, and I have a firm grasp on what these kinds of co-ops are looking for in NASCO. Second, I am studying Urban Studies and Real Estate Finance, so I bring both a humanist, ethical perspective and a financial perspective to the board. I have taken Real Estate Law classes, Real Estate Taxation Classes, and several classes addressing gentrification. Third, I am habitually punctual; I have missed no committee meetings for the committees I serve on and had never had unexcused absences from board responsibilities.



Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

All my commitments in my life revolve around co-ops. Making time for NASCO and working with NASCO has never been a problem for me. Looking to the future, I want to join PlanCo so I can help NASCO achieve its long-term goals, as well as staying a member of Member Engagement and potentially Exec.

Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?

As a board member, I would love to continue working on the anti-gentrification working group that was tentatively started last spring. I think there are a lot of benefits that could be reaped by this group, and I want to re-open the dialogue about this. Additionally, I have been working with staff to create a program which directly connects board members to member co-ops, and I plan to continue working on this project.