

North American Students of Cooperation
Plan for Inclusion 2016-17

The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO) Plan for Inclusion is an annual document designed to guide the organization towards greater inclusivity for its board, membership and affiliates. After a year of accomplishments, the Plan for Inclusion will continue to grow the organization's vision for inclusion and creating a welcoming environment for all of NASCO's affiliates. This year's Plan for Inclusion is written by the Vice President of NASCO, Topaz Hooper.

According to Bylaw 8.8:

Co-op Caucus and other interested members, will adopt a NASCO 'Plan for Inclusion' with:

- measurable goals and timetables for increasing the ethnic and economic diversity of the organization, diversifying NASCO leadership, and increasing the participation of persons of color, parents, non-students and others traditionally underrepresented in NASCO.
- Officers and staff will dedicate appropriate time and resources to meet the goals and timetables of the Plan for Inclusion, and recommend similar changes to NASCO affiliate organizations.
- At each Annual Meeting, 'Board Report on Plan for Inclusion' and 'Plan for Inclusion Decisions' will be an agenda item. The members will discuss the report and may vote on amendments to the plan proposed by caucuses or active members.

In other words, the Plan for Inclusion will give achievable and measurable goals and timelines to be followed by the board and staff collective. Within the past year, the following goals have been achieved from last year's Plan for Inclusion:

- Anti-Oppression programming at CETI (annual institute)
- Caucuses and working groups brought communities with underrepresented identities together to dialogue and strategize about their role in the cooperative movement
 - Past caucuses have included: People of Color, LGBTQA, Persons with Disabilities, Women's, Working Class, Collective Liberation, various guerilla caucuses and more.
- The election of three board positions; one through the Person of Color caucus and two via the Diversity Congress.
- Met the Low-Income Scholarship Fund (LISF) goal of \$14,000 for institute attendees occupying marginalized identities such as low income, LGBTQA, persons of color and more.
- Anti-oppression trainings from professionals, staff collective and board members with topics ranging from anti-racism to classism, gender identification to nonviolent communication.
- Completion of exit surveys and interviews to monitor and assess areas of improvement for inclusion from exiting board members.
- Board buddy assignments that ensured new board members could find seasoned or experienced members for guidance and mentorship.
- Rotational leadership to reduce burnout among committee members.

These are all applaudable achievements. Every year, the Plan for Inclusion offers innovative ways to grow NASCO's capacity for inclusion and engagement. While we should applaud what great work the organization has achieved, we must also acknowledge the gaps in achievement in other areas of the organization.

The Plan for Inclusion 2016-17 will primarily focus on four areas: (1) Board Member Retention, Engagement and Leadership, (2) Safer Spaces for Board Members, (3) Expanding the Cooperative Movement Ethically, and (4) Caucus Process Re-evaluations. It is imperative to manage the inner workings of an organization in order to expand the work into the greater community. This is why two out of the four topics for this year's plan focuses on board member relationships and leadership capabilities. Once board member relationships can flourish and leadership begins to radiate, the NASCO Board can work outward to continue the organization's mission in an ethical and conscious way. As NASCO helps cooperatives thrive around the U.S. and Canada, the organization must also be conscious of the ever growing epidemic of gentrification in nearly every major city in North America. NASCO can find ways to expand the movement while also helping local communities live without displacement. This is one of the many issues the cooperative movement faces today. I will speak to achievable methods for NASCO to grow the cooperative movement from the inside out.

Goal Number 1: Board Member Retention, Engagement and Leadership

Board member retention and leadership is a running topic every year for NASCO's Plan for Inclusion. That is partly because every year there are new and innovative ways to address the issue. The following suggestions are designed to engage board members, enhance their leadership potential and support retention.

1. **Survey incoming board members to gain a sense of what they hope to get out of the NASCO experience.** With this information, existing board members and the staff collective can understand which positions on the board would best fit the personal interests of new board members in the organization. This can create more engagement and increased productivity on the board. *Complete by: before 1st in-person board meeting on April 2017.*
2. **Host panels and discussions at institute and in board meetings to demystify NASCO jargon and methodology.** New board members may not have the full picture of NASCO's organizational timelines, goals, or methods. Staff members who work with the NASCO Board, in collaboration with the Inclusion Committee, will build information sessions during and in-between board meetings to demystify acronyms and processes of the organization. *Complete by: on-going*
3. **Build quorum policies for committees with reward based incentives.** This will ensure committees meet regularly and productively. Build in rewards or acknowledgements like "perfect attendance", "best committee innovator", "most fundraised for LISF", "best facilitator", etc. Supplement these awards with gift cards or plaques to build healthy competition in the organization and increase committee participation. *Complete by: on-going.*

Goal Number 2: Create Safer Spaces for Board Members

Completely safe spaces for traditionally marginalized groups are hard to come by and even harder to maintain. That is why it is important to strive for safe(r) spaces. This implies board spaces are a work in progress and constantly adapt as the issues that faced marginalized groups on the board evolve. Overall, board members who feel respected, heard, and acknowledged will likely serve the organization and the cooperative movement well. The following suggestions are methods and avenues to help create safer spaces for board members in NASCO.

1. **Build stronger support systems for board members with marginalized identities.** The current board buddy system has its purpose: help new board members find allyship and points of information from existing board members. However, the organization must look beyond the board buddy system to address insufficient support systems for board members experiencing difficulties on the board. The NASCO Board should find additional ways to support board members with marginalized identities to navigate historically white dominated, able-bodied, and cisgender board meeting spaces. The board can budget for more anti-oppression trainings designed to dig deeper into identity politics and power dynamics on the board. *Complete by: ongoing*
2. **Address the erasure of marginalized identities on the board.** When dialogues about identity, power and privilege become an unexpected topic during board meetings, the board must find strategic ways to meet the needs of the person(s) who feels underrepresented and unheard. The board must first acknowledge the need for dialogue and build in time to compassionately engage in the topic(s). Have the Vibes Watcher in the meeting monitor the room and suggest breaks, a change of environment or “Move up, Move up” to ensure voices from a few excited board members do not overshadow the voices of others. During board meetings, implement deeper and more comprehensive icebreakers or introduction activities so identities on the board are acknowledged and discussed early on. *Complete by: ongoing*
3. **Create facilitated conflict resolution spaces.** When board members do not feel respected, heard, or acknowledged, conflict may arise on the board between the parties involved. Build 1-2 hours outside of board meeting time to share experiences and solutions towards board cohesion and trust. *Complete by: as needed*

Goal Number 3: Expand the Cooperative Movement Ethically

As an organization, NASCO must be aware of how the cooperative movement is strengthening or displacing communities. The following goals will help NASCO expand the cooperative movement in just and ethical ways.

1. **Engage board and active members around community-focused anti-gentrification efforts.** Board members and NASCO active members come from neighborhoods and communities actively affected by cooperative expansion. Their communities may actually be experiencing gentrification in ways that negatively impact their individual cooperatives. Have board members reach out to

Active Member co-ops and gain insight on what individual communities are experiencing around gentrification and displacement. This knowledge can inform the organization on how to best expand the movement with localized community insight. *Complete by: Spring board meeting April 2017 or during AGM at Institute*

2. **Research anti-gentrification information and identify methods of cooperative development without displacement.** Share knowledge and information with members on the NASCO Properties and NASCO Development Services boards. Build stronger relationships with these boards through shared anti-gentrification efforts. Support and build upon anti-gentrification work as written in the NASCO Family Strategic Plan 2016. *Complete by: ongoing*
3. **Identify potential anti-oppressive and anti-gentrification partner organizations.** Partnerships will be useful when filling in gaps in knowledge between NASCO and expanding the cooperative movement. Local organizations in cities or towns of expansion already have a sense of what communities need and where gentrification is happening at increasingly high rates. Organize a liaison, have a member of the staff collective or member of the Anti-Gentrification working group to identify and contact anti-oppression, anti-gentrification, and community organizing groups in the area. *Complete by: once anti-gentrification working group is established or by September 2017.*

Goal Number 4: Caucus Process Re-evaluations

Caucuses have been one of the most effective ways for NASCO to recruit marginalized groups to join the board. Caucuses have been the avenue for upward mobility for people of color, women, low-income people, folks with disabilities, and so many others. However, in recent years, the organization has received many critiques about term lengths and support systems for board members elected through the caucuses. The following suggestions seek to address the critiques of caucuses and provide solutions for change.

1. **Re-evaluate term lengths for Diversity Congress Chair and Co-Chair positions.** According to the NASCO Bylaw 6.46, the current Diversity Congress Chair and Co-Chair are elected to the NASCO Board through the caucuses. Traditionally, the chair and co-chair each serve a one year term. One critique is the Diversity Congress Chair and Co-Chair have difficulty implementing changes in the organization with one year of experience. I suggest re-evaluating the term length for these positions and consider a two year term length for the Diversity Congress Chair and the co-chair. The extension will enable the chair and co-chair to spend the first year evaluating the board's diversity and inclusivity practices, then utilizing the second year to implement changes and provide recommendations. *Complete by: October 2016, pre-CETI 2016 (if possible) or October 2017, pre-CETI 2017*
2. **Organize information sessions during Institute for potential caucus leaders and board members.** Another critique of the caucus process is caucus leaders do not have enough notice or information about the NASCO Board before they are asked to join at the end of a caucus session. The Inclusion Committee, in partnership with other interested NASCO board members, can conduct 3 minute

announcements before a caucus session begins to properly inform participants of the opportunity awaiting them at the end of the session. In addition, the Inclusion Committee, in partnership with other board members, can organize a panel or session to demystify NASCO's work, organizational goals, and provide transparency about the potential avenues for the board election process. Complete by: CETI 2016

3. **Send intentional emails to Active Member Cooperatives about joining the NASCO Board through the caucuses at CETI.** The Staff collective has done a fabulous job sending emails to Active Members and notifying them of opportunities within the organization. Staff, in partnership with the Inclusion Committee, can craft emails designed to provide information about board elections *specifically* through the caucus process. This way Active Members have enough notice to prepare and send their best candidates forward. Complete by: November 2016 or pre-CETI.
4. **Reevaluate the goals of caucus appointments.** The Inclusion Committee and/or the board can work to reimagine what purpose candidates elected through the caucuses are expected to fulfill. The Diversity Congress (Co)-Chair and the Person of Color Caucus Chair are designed to fill certain niches and roles in the organization. The Board can discuss specifically what those roles are in the upcoming 2016/17 election year. Complete by: November 2016 or pre-CETI.
5. **Engage caucus members beyond Institute.** Each caucus Chair should arrange at least one conference call per year, with the help of a staff member or Inclusion Committee member. Staff should maintain caucus email list serves and each caucus chairs should send an email to their caucus list serv several times per year to spark discussion.

These goals and subgoals were inspired by NASCO's mission statement: "*The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO) Family [of associations] organizes and educates affordable group equity co-ops and their members for the purpose of promoting a community oriented cooperative movement.*" The Plan for Inclusion seeks to incorporate NASCO's overarching goal of organizing and educating cooperatives to expand the cooperative movement in goal three. The "equity" piece in the mission statement is where the inclusion and anti-gentrification ideations come into play.

The Plan for Inclusion 2016-17 addresses the advancement of the cooperative movement through leadership and engagement by increasing NASCO's board member leadership potential and participation. The plan also address developing new cooperatives through working groups and partnerships with anti-oppression/gentrification organizations. The plan touches on increasing the organizational stability of the NASCO family by recommending deeper partnerships with NASCO Properties and NASCO Development Services around ethical cooperative expansion. In addition, the plan seeks to challenge systems of privilege and oppression through the creation of safer spaces for board members who are new, occupy marginalized identities or experience identity erasure on the board. Last but not least, the plan addresses anti-oppression and power

dynamics on the board by re-evaluating the caucus process to ensure we are setting new board members up for success with reasonable term lengths and expectations.

This document will be addressed during the upcoming board meeting on Sunday, September 18th, 2016 where it will be assessed for achievability and validity by the NASCO Board.