

CO-OPERATIVES UK

⇒ KICK-START
⇐ CO-OPERATIVE
GROWTH
LOCALLY

BUSINESS SUPPORT SOLUTIONS FOR YOU



*Front cover images: BATCOM, Gloucestershire(top);
Sister Midnight, London (bottom. Credit: Jake Ollett)*

BUSINESS SUPPORT SOLUTIONS FOR YOU

We are the only nationwide network of co-operative development experts.

We support all types of co-operatives in every sector and at all stages of the business lifecycle.

We are co-ordinated, collaborative and ready to plug into your co-operative and social economy support programmes.

Contact partnerships@uk.coop to discuss how we can tailor our services to your needs and aspirations.



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READY-MADE SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Combined authorities, councils and new strategic authorities can use co-operative growth to help deliver on a range of objectives, from revitalising high streets and building affordable housing, to improving social care, retrofitting homes and creating good jobs in foundational sectors.

These authorities have a crucial role to play in enabling co-operative growth and impact. But authorities and their local partners are often held back by not having the expertise and capacity needed to match their policy ambition.

This is where Co-operatives UK and our national network of expert advisors come in.

We offer practical and cost-effective solutions for combined authorities, local authorities, national government and others to enable them to deliver on their co-operative growth ambitions.

This prospectus sets out how the solutions we offer can be tailored to the needs of each local context.

With our partners, we can play a key role in enabling effective local co-operative development interventions.

We do this by:

- **Co-ordinating co-operative business support**, enabling local capacity to be combined with the only nationwide network of expert and experienced business advisors and peer supporters. Our co-ordination of this network provides an efficient and cost-effective way for local initiatives to draw on this invaluable resource.
- **Supporting local awareness raising and outreach** initiatives that help communities, entrepreneurs and businesses to explore co-operative options at relevant junctures.
- **Partnering in innovation projects** trialling new targeted initiatives to support co-operative development.
- **Sharing insights** gained from working every day with co-operative businesses, to inform local approaches.



WHY CO-OPERATIVES?

We have great opportunities to grow the number, scale and impact of UK co-operatives in ways that address major societal challenges. These include inclusive growth, living standards, net zero, economic security, deprivation, regeneration, community resilience, social cohesion, public service innovation, food security and housing.

Significant growth in co-operatives and mutuals is a manifesto commitment for the UK government, and a policy of the governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is also increasingly a policy goal locally in many parts of the UK.

What are co-operatives?

Co-operatives are a distinctive way of organising activities and resources, focused on collaboration and sharing power and wealth. They are not just a choice of legal form and are far more than a governance model.

Co-operatives exist to meet the shared needs and aspirations of one or more stakeholder groups, such as local residents, workers, other businesses and even public bodies. Often this part of a social mission. A co-operative is democratically owned and controlled by these stakeholders.

A co-operative approach can be beneficial when:

- **Collective action** enables people to achieve more together than they could on their own. For example, local people building a solar farm, employees buying the business they work for, or farmers pooling resources in their own processing facility.
- Empowering stakeholders through participation and democratic governance can **drive purpose and increase impact**. For example, giving users a say in the provision of social care, tenants a say in the running of their housing scheme, or employees a say where they work.

There are more than 7,300 co-operatives in the UK, with a combined annual turnover of £42.7bn and a disproportionately large £32bn GVA, providing jobs to more than 230,000 people.

The co-operative approach is successfully used in sectors including food, renewables, land and property, housing, digital, creative, manufacture, social care, retail, hospitality and leisure. There are three million co-operatives globally with a combined annual turnover in excess of £1.7 trillion.



Co-operative superpowers

The co-operative approach has three unique superpowers:

- Effective and efficient collaboration, with members achieving more together than they can alone.
- Effective sharing of opportunity, power and wealth through day-to-day activities.
- Increased economic and social resilience for individuals, organisations and communities.

KICK-START CO-OPERATIVE GROWTH LOCALLY

The next few pages outline the ways our network can support your co-operative development goals. Find out how to:

- Plug-in to our **Business Support for Co-ops programme**
- Support registrations for new co-operatives through **our start-up portal**
- Inspire new co-operatives through **business incubators and accelerator programmes**
- Raise awareness of co-operatives through **outreach and campaigns**
- Organise **study visits** to grow understanding of, and connections with, successful co-operatives operating in your area
- **Access co-operative expertise**, including in-house training for your staff and business advisor networks

Co-operatives UK welcomes partnerships with grant funders and public bodies. Alongside our long-standing partner, The Co-operative Bank, we deliver co-operative development activities with a wide range of partners, including Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Growth Hubs.

Contact partnerships@uk.coop to discuss how we can tailor our services to your needs and aspirations.



4,000+

groups have benefited from the Business Support for Co-ops programme, from direct support to free events

PLUG-IN TO OUR BUSINESS SUPPORT FOR CO-OPS PROGRAMME

Boost co-operative development in your area by becoming a paying partner in Business Support for Co-ops.

This secures:

- Access to a ready-made programme, including the application process.
- Support packages specifically for your local area or region in addition to our nationally-funded service.
- Flexible options that can be tailored to local priorities and conditions.
- Access to our unique network of experts.

Our system ensures the types of organisations you want to support are matched with the right experts, while keeping your overheads low.

Business Support for Co-ops, operates across the UK in partnership with The Co-operative Bank. It offers up to four days of one-to-one support to:

- Groups wanting to start a co-operative.
- Existing co-operatives wanting to develop or grow.
- Existing businesses converting to a co-operative.

Support is tailored to the needs of the groups and is delivered by our national network of experts, which includes our in-house advice team.

+80%

of co-operatives receiving direct business support are still trading

Our unique national network of experts delivers:

- **Extensive knowledge about every type of co-operative and sector** (e.g. community ownership, housing, worker co-operatives, employee buyouts, social care, energy and retrofit).
- **Deep understanding of every stage of business development** – from exploration and start-up through to onward development, diversification and, when needed, revitalisation.
- **A full spectrum of expertise**, including business models and planning, finances, organisational design, governance, culture and more.

In addition, we **facilitate peer support networks** between co-operatives from similar sectors or facing similar challenges, which contributes to creating long lasting bonds between local co-operatives.



UTILISE OUR START-UP PORTAL

We offer an online portal that supports co-operative founders through their start-up journey.

The portal includes a step-by-step tool packed with information and resources.

It includes an **online registration service** providing a straightforward way to incorporate a new co-operative. For a small fee, founders are supported by Co-operatives UK's Advice Team at every stage of the process and are offered one year's free Co-operatives UK membership once incorporated.

There is an option for local partners to subsidise more registrations via this portal.



The team were very helpful and patient with us since we had to go backwards and forwards a few times. The advice they gave us was spot on and I'm glad they were able to guide us through incorporation rather than us trying to muddle through it all ourselves.

Founder of the co-operative Fairbnb, an online platform for hosts to advertise their accommodation and guests to find places to stay.

Start a new co-op : step by step

Share



Published

15th July 2020

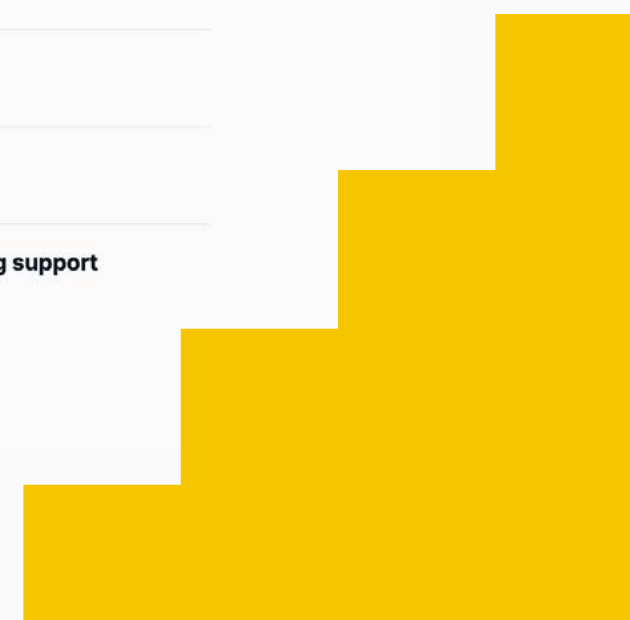
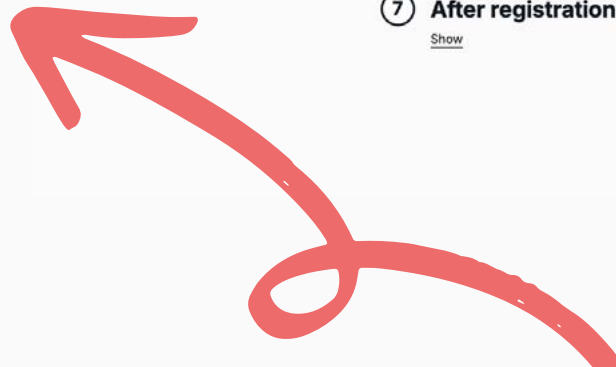
Last updated

26th January 2023

This section takes you through the start-up process for setting up a co-op.

Keep track of where you're up to, and look out for sign-posts if you need more support along the way. Finally make sure you use our quick and easy to use registration form (step 6) to get your co-op up and running in no time!

- 1 **Test your business idea**
[Show](#)
- 2 **Is a co-op right for your business?**
[Show](#)
- 3 **Finance your business**
[Show](#)
- 4 **Create a business plan**
[Show](#)
- 5 **Choose a co-op structure**
[Show](#)
- 6 **Register your co-operative**
[Show](#)
- 7 **After registration and ongoing support**
[Show](#)



INSPIRE INNOVATION THROUGH BUSINESS INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS

We run incubator or accelerator programmes for co-operatives operating in specific locations, sectors or at similar stages of development.

This activity consists of structured programmes delivered over a defined period of time to a selected cohort of organisations.

The programmes can consist of a combination of training and direct support and can be delivered in person or online.

These types of programmes often have the effect of raising awareness of the co-operative model beyond the groups being supported.

“

We have learnt so much over the last ten weeks about co-operation and many aspects of running a worker collective. As teachers, we've broadened our skill set hugely. It has been wonderful to get to know the rest of the cohort and see what a bright future they will have too – they are truly innovative ideas.

Lucy Stephens, co-founder of Red Brick Language School who participated in the UnFound Accelerator, the first programme worldwide to offer support to co-operatives operating through a digital platform.

“

I am grateful for taking part in the programme. It has really boosted my confidence to have a foundation of knowledge in areas I previously felt I had no ability in. Now I feel more able to give things a go.

Participant in the Business for Good West Yorkshire Growth and Resilience accelerator

Deep Time (bottom) won the 2023 UnFound Accelerator pitch event (top), which took place at the end of a three month online accelerator for co-operatively-owned digital platforms.



RAISE AWARENESS OF CO-OPERATIVES THROUGH OUTREACH AND CAMPAIGNS



We support local partners to develop campaigns to inspire people to start, support, work with or buy from co-operatives. Save valuable time and resource by using our approaches that have been proven to work.

We can provide:

- **Case studies** of co-operatives, drawn from the local area, the UK and internationally.
- **Bespoke assets** for online or print media.
- **Outreach and campaign co-ordination** with local and national organisations.

We can also support the development of coordinated marketing campaigns to promote the services of a select number of local co-operatives.

In addition to offering business support, it is essential to help communities, social entrepreneurs and existing businesses to explore co-operative approaches at relevant junctures.

We can help you target outreach and awareness raising initiatives, so that the right people consider a co-operative approach when it's useful for them to do so.

We can support local partners to create and run workshops on various themes and in different formats. They can be in person or online and can range from 1-hour activities to a whole day.

Examples of workshops we deliver are:

- **Discover co-ops workshops** that inspire people to set up co-operatives through the lens of sectors or societal challenges, from arts and culture, and tech and digital to climate action.
- **Is a co-op right for you? workshops** that give founders an overview of what a co-op is and the route to starting one.
- **Business support workshops** for co-operatives on specific themes ranging from how to write a business plan or raise finance, to training for co-op leaders.
- **Peer networking workshops** where we facilitate connections and peer support between new and existing local co-ops.



Case study: West Midlands Ownership Hub

The Caribbean Creative Convention was part of an initiative by the West Midlands Ownership Hub to help black freelancers in creative industries explore co-operative approaches for their businesses. The gathering brought together musicians, artists and entrepreneurs to hear how a co-operative approach can enable resilience, opportunity and productivity in creative industries.



The workshop was the vital first step in our journey. It enabled us to see how Deaf people could be brought into co-op ownership at the same time as interpreters.

Jen Bird from Signalise, a co-op for Deaf people and British Sign Language interpreters, on the *Is a co-op right for you?* webinar they attended.

ORGANISE STUDY VISITS

We can organise study visits to local co-operatives that attract multiple audiences:

- Local business advisors or local authority staff wanting to better understand the co-operative model.
- Local people wanting to get to know more about their local co-op ecosystem.
- Founders wanting to set up their own co-op.
- Existing co-op members wanting to learn from other co-ops.

It was an absolute pleasure to host [the study visit]. We were able to share the highs, the lows and the challenges of setting up and maintaining a community building as a co-operative. The team really enjoyed meeting many people interested in what we have achieved here at Holmfirth Tech and sharing awareness of the support and different ways of doing business.

Holmfirth Tech offered a study visit to organisations participating in the Business for Good West Yorkshire Programme delivered by Co-operatives UK and Stir to Action.



Example of social media activity following a study visit to Suma Wholefoods, a worker co-operative based in West Yorkshire. (Credit: Suma Wholefoods)



BUILD YOUR EXPERTISE THROUGH OUR NETWORK

Co-operatives UK is the UK's politically independent association of co-operative businesses.

Our mission is to empower and grow the UK's co-operative economy, and in doing so, to build a better world through co-operation. A national institution that has been around for more than 150 years, Co-operatives UK is uniquely placed to support local and national government to meet co-operative growth objectives, by:

- Convening co-operatives, nationally and locally.
- Sharing our deep expertise, intelligence and insight, gained from working every day with co-operative of all sizes, in every sector.
- Co-ordinating a national network of co-operative development specialists.



Co-operatives UK made everything so easy. They have a wealth of knowledge on various topics.

Management Development Services Limited on receiving consultancy from Co-operatives UK.

Co-operatives UK has a track record of delivering long lasting impact as demonstrated from the results of some of our most successful services:

- Providing business support to more than 500 new and existing co-operatives since 2016, of which 80% are still trading today.
- Leading the development of the Community Shares finance model, alongside Locality and Plunkett, which has led to more than £200 million of investment in over 500 co-operatives in the past decade.
- Market leading advice services focused on co-operative governance, legal and HR.



Building local ecosystems

A strong local ecosystem of thriving, networked co-operatives and development bodies can be an invaluable partner in more inclusive, sustainable and community-led development. Combined authorities, councils and strategic authorities can be instrumental in strengthening these local ecosystems.

Our network can help you do this by:

- Convening local co-operatives and development bodies.
- Arranging training and learning opportunities for officers, business advisors and civil society organisations, to help them understand co-operatives and the relevance to their work.
- Arranging training for people to become co-operative development specialists, for example, through the Barefoot programme.
- Sharing our intelligence and insights from other places and the national picture.

Co-operatives UK delivers expert advice to 100s of co-operatives each year.



BUSINESS SUPPORT: IMPACTS

Funding from The Co-operative Bank and local partners allows us to deliver co-op development activities that work towards our common aims of growing and strengthening the co-operative movement

+80%

of co-operatives receiving direct business support are still trading

Since 2016, through these activities:

- **More than 4,000 groups have benefited from support** by attending events, receiving director or peer mentor support or being subsidised to register their co-operative.
- **More than 2,850 people have registered** to attend one of our events about co-operatives.
- **More than 850 groups have applied for direct support** for their co-operative or for help to set one up.
- Nearly **550 groups have been received direct support** for their co-operative, including existing co-operatives, start-ups and existing organisations wanting to convert to the co-operative model.
- **More than 80%** of co-operatives receiving support through the Business Support for Co-ops programme are still trading.
- **Nearly 700 co-ops have registered using our incorporation tool** since it was introduced in 2018. This **equates to 45% of all co-operatives incorporated** in the UK since then.

4.85/5

Average rating of support received by co-operatives through the Business Support for Co-ops programme



CO-OPERATIVES UK

Find out how we can help you:

- Read the full Business Support prospectus at www.uk.coop/partnerships
- To discuss how we can tailor our services to your needs and aspirations, contact partnerships@uk.coop

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Registered in England as a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. Reg No. 2783R. Vat Reg. 147 8611 47.

