

BUILDING MOMENTUM: START-UP CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU BEGIN – PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- Do you want a business model that reverses the absence of Indigenous knowledge, language, lifeways and that is customized to Indigenous culture?
- Do you want a business that is owned and cooperatively controlled by the people who use the services?
- Do you want a business that benefits the members and that gives members a say in making decisions?
- Do you want a business that is a model for community development and job creation?
- Do you have unique needs and goals that can be achieved through collective ownership?
- Do you want to create self-determination and self-sustainability through a shared vision?

THE INGREDIENTS OF INDIGENOUS COOPERATIVE JOURNEY

- A compelling need with a clear connection between the need and the business model is critical.
- A strong champion(s), these are the community members who are relationship-builders, trusted, accountable, and informal leaders.
- A clear vision – avoid trying to meet multiple needs through one cooperative business enterprise, keep it simple first.
- A good business idea – development with Indigenous communities invests energy in all aspects of cooperative journey, from inspiring the idea to exploring the possibilities within the local context, to building a culturally-driven business model that addresses a clearly-identified need, and in supporting the cooperative to thrive beyond its incorporation stage to a fully-fledged, operating cooperative enterprise.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUNDING MEMBERS

- They are committed to strengthening the well-being of their community,
- They are committed to the project,
- They are motivated by a common vision,
- They operate with integrity, transparency and accountability,
- They are interested in the best cooperative business model possible,
- They are relationship builders, creative and flexible thinkers.

BEGIN BY BUILDING A LIST OF POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Be strategic, consider the people on your list to be potential members, volunteers, supporters, investors and patrons.

- Tribal leadership,
- Tribal government department heads and staff,
- Tribal Business Development Corporation staff,
- Community members and families,
- Elders, knowledge holders and language speakers,
- Neighboring tribal communities,
- Native Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) staff,
- Area native nonprofits and community organizations,
- Tribal Colleges, staff and students,
- Local youth leaders,

- Local tribal/BIE schools and staff,
- Foundations,
- Other Indigenous led cooperatives.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEETINGS AND GATHERING DURING THE PRE-PLANNING AND PLANNING STAGES

- Post meetings in the tribal paper, on listserves and social media.
- Elders should be invited to all community meetings and asked for guidance and prayer.
- Plan for honorariums and gifts that are culturally appropriate for elders and volunteers.
- Design meetings to accommodate and welcome children and families.
- Plan on offering food and beverages or encourage community potlucks at all meetings.
- Build connections with other Indigenous cooperatives and invite them to present at your meetings.
- Ensure all voices are heard by using talking circles and community visioning processes.
- Maintain honest, open communications with your community.

DEVELOP A PLAN TO BUILD AWARENESS, ONGOING EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Build messaging and communication with the goal of improving the flow of information and benefits of Indigenous-led cooperatives to the community.
- Emphasize the importance of relationship building, enhanced dialogue, partnerships, and the centrality of Indigenous perspectives.
- Introduce community to an Indigenized cooperative model.
- Introduce community to other Indigenous-led cooperatives and processes.
- Apply cultural knowledge-sharing through talking circles to develop the group's capacity and knowledge of cooperative governance, where each person has a say and vote.
- Commit to a continuous communication plan inclusive of community members, tribal leadership, partners and consultants.
- Work with language speakers and developers to design long-range support and training that covers all aspects of governance, leading meetings, business and economic planning, accounting, and business development skills.
- Ensure the community is fully engaged, that they are part of the vision and collective aspiration.

CHARACTERISTICS TO LOOK FOR WHEN SECURING A COOPERATIVE DEVELOPER

- They are committed to listen, learn, build trust, respect, and build a positive and supportive working relationship.
- They are committed to learning how to work with Indigenous communities both on and off reservations and gain basic understanding of key federal laws and acts that have and continue to impact Indigenous communities.
- They have knowledge of colonial structures and models, and discriminatory practices that have been imposed on Indigenous communities.
- They have knowledge of other successful Indigenous-led cooperatives and how they have included, supported, or been based on, language, traditional practices, and pursuits.
- They understand that each tribal community is distinct, and the cooperative process requires engaging fully with each community, accepting the history, collective aspirations, economic diversity, and underlying realities of each.