

Summary of Community Co-design Chats

In addition to co-design with our partner organizations, we have also been participating in conversations with members of the Platform Co-op community to co-design the Learning Commons. So far we've completed an initial round of community co-design chats to understand the challenges and needs around learning for those in the platform co-op ecosystem, as well as to solicit ideas. This has informed early sketches, information architecture, and content types for the Learning Commons.

In the future, conversations will be more centred around ideating concepts and evaluating tangible sketches and design artifacts for the Learning Commons.

Goals of our conversations

The questions we've asked in our initial conversations include:

- What are some of the learning goals you have related to platform co-ops?
- What are some of the barriers or challenges you face in online learning, and finding the information you need? How have you attempted to overcome those challenges?
- How would you like to be able to search for the information you need, in relation to your learning goals?
- What are some links to learning tools or resources that you like? What do you like about them?
- Any other ideas, perspectives, or thoughts on what the resource library should be, or what pain points it should address?

Who we talked to

We've talked to a total of 6 individuals, and have also gotten input from attending two events: a Co-op Shop Talk event hosted by Geo.Coop, and an online meeting hosted by Zebras Unite. The individuals' roles ranged from co-op member-owner, prospective co-op member owner (thinking of starting a platform co-op), co-op developer, and researcher. Their backgrounds include policy and law, technology, design, food, and social work.

Missing perspectives

We are in the process of creating connections with more researchers, union leaders, freelancers, and business owners who have converted to a co-op. We are also missing the perspectives of those who cannot afford to talk to us due to a lack of compensation.

What we heard

Learning goals and challenges

- **Financing and funding:** Funding continues to be difficult for many co-ops and platform co-ops out there - especially for founders that are from diverse backgrounds.
- **Governance and distributed decision making:** Putting an effective governance system in place and doing distributed decision making is a challenge - especially putting one in place that allows everyone to come around the table to make collective decisions, but also remains agile enough that decision making doesn't become a bottleneck.
- **Cooperative best practices:** Going from a competitive to cooperative business model can present a lot of challenges for individual co-op members. There is a need for resources and tools that help remove the anxiety of doing together.
- **Business operations that aren't co-op specific:** For a lot of people who are starting a co-op, it's often their first time starting a business too. Because of this, there are a lot of things that aren't co-op specific, but are crucial for the success of a co-op or platform co-op. These include things like how to do human resources, build a business model, build a marketing plan, build a website, validate the value of their business with their customers, and becoming investor-ready.
- **Political advocacy:** Learning how to advocate for policy change in locations where co-op laws do not allow co-ops and platform co-ops to fully flourish is really important. There is a need for tools and resources to help people learn how to do this, that also can be recontextualized to different countries and locales.
- **Location-specific law and policy:** Co-op laws and policies range from location to location. People expressed a need to be able to understand the limits and realities that these things present.
- **Platform co-ops as a viable startup business model:** Platform co-ops are not currently as an equally viable model as traditional startups. There is a desire to see more education in this area, especially for those who advise startups.

Ways of learning

- **Case studies:** A lot of existing literature around platform co-ops are more theoretical, and written in language that can be complex and academic. There is a strong desire for practical how-to's, especially in the form of examples and case studies.
- **Social learning:** People expressed that reading isn't always the best medium for many people to learn. This is especially true for marginalized communities, or co-ops that are trying to apply knowledge from another context, ex. from another country. In these cases, often sitting down and having a conversation to support re-contextualizing knowledge works best. Other ways of social learning include: One-on-one consultations, coaching and mentoring, study groups, and forming communities of practice.

Finding information

- A need for multiple points of entry: There is a desire to see multiple ways of entry to the resources, in order to make information easier to find, especially for those who are just starting out.

Important categories to filter by

These are not meant to be an exhaustive list, rather, a list of things that came up in addition to our initial list of categories. The initial list included: goals, topics, industry, location, language, medium.

- **Problems to solve:** Sorting resources and case studies by the problems they are solving encourages lateral learning across silos and other pre-defined categories, such as type of co-op. Oftentimes knowledge can be inferred across these categories, even if the case study doesn't feature a type of business that is exactly identical to your own.
- **Demographics:** There is a desire to not replicate exclusive structures and ways of doing business, and to be more intentional about creating accessible and inclusive businesses and platforms. For example, based on one of the co-op member owners we spoke with, the food co-op world is vastly white, and African American groups are starting their own food co-ops in Detroit and other food desert areas. For her, there is a desire to learn from these particular co-ops so that if she were to start her own co-ops, she can learn from a structure that isn't rooted in or benefitting from discriminatory structures and institutions.
- **Ownership:** While certain knowledge can be shared across different types of co-ops, other types of knowledge needs to be specific to different co-op types. For example, worker owned co-op can be very different from member-owned co-ops for its governance model and funding structure.

Other needs we heard

Networks as a crucial learning mechanism

- **The existing knowledge and knowledge holders are silo'd and scattered:** Currently, knowledge is silo'd in their own expertise groups and areas, and not broadly shared across the platform co-op ecosystem. If one needs assistance, they currently have to call around in their networks and piece together disparate pieces of information and advice.
- **Networks are crucial for the co-ops to thrive:** People expressed a desire to have a place to openly share and converse across silo's, to share community knowledge and solve problems together. This will also assist co-ops and platform co-ops in building their networks - at the end of the day, co-ops cannot be alone in their development and need the support of a community of professionals, developers, and other supports in order to thrive.

Continuous feedback & improvement

- **For co-op developers to understand how to support co-ops:** There is a desire from co-op developers to be in touch with needs of different co-ops out there, so they're able to shape the support as much as possible.
- **Feedback on resources and content areas for constant improvement of the Learning Commons:** There is a desire to be able to rate resources in the Learning Commons as helpful or not to achieving a particular goal.