

Background: Study circles have been a part of cooperative organizing since the 19th century, especially in African American communities. Given the collaborative, democratic and popular education focus of study circles, they are a natural educational companion to cooperative organizing. The blend of adult education, community organizing and group development continue to make them a powerful tool in helping to educate potential cooperators and develop connections within their ecosystem.

Overview: The study circle proposal is built around UHAB's national affordable co-op housing training. These study circles would provide an opportunity for local groups, in this case in Chicago, to come together, explore cooperative history, methods, philosophy, and processes. Participants in the study circles may not want to take UHAB's national incubator program, and instead may be just learning about co-ops for the first time, or housing organizers that want to learn more about LECs, or groups that are looking to build trust amongst their members while learning more about Co-ops or the development process. Some of the key features of the study circle courses include:

- Introduction to affordable co-op housing and UHAB
- An entry point into UHAB's National Affordable Housing Co-op Incubator Program
- An opportunity to connect with national and local experts and developers
- Ability to network with other local housing groups and strengthen the housing co-op ecosystem
- Access to a customized curriculum that uses a historic teaching model

Philosophy & Pedagogy: The study circle curriculum will be rooted in local co-op and organizing history, and be designed to be flexible enough to evolve with the goals and interests of each cohort's members. The groups will meet bi-weekly for 3-4 months, covering at least 6 sessions. The sessions will be facilitated and moderated by UHAB staff as well as a local liaison that is connected with the community and on the ground with the participants. Some of the key pedagogical features of the study circle include:

- The groups will receive an assigned list of readings, videos, audio, etc. to explore for each session. These lists can be customized by the facilitators based on the cohort's experience and goals.
- The sessions (zoom or in-person) will be discussion based and participatory. There will be a series of discussion questions and potential activities for each session, and it will be up to the facilitators and participants to define the goals and direction of each session.
- The initial training will include UHAB staff, though the courses will be designed so that they can be facilitated without a UHAB presence. In this regard, the goal is to create a curriculum that is flexible enough to cover a broad range of experience and interest, and

structured enough that a facilitator with local knowledge and a co-op background can run the course without UHAB facilitation.

Some of the overall goals for the study circle include:

- Building group trust and cohesion
- Understanding local co-op and housing organizing and co-op history
- Connecting local efforts to the broader co-op movement
- Understanding the intersection between housing organizing and affordable housing co-ops

Study Circle Outline:

Session 1: Why Co-ops? Principles and Values (Principles)

Activities: introductions, get to know you; what co-ops do you know, are you a part of? Why are you here? What appeals to you about coop values? Why coops?

Learning Goals:

- What is a co-op?
- What are cooperative values and principles?
- What is the co-op difference?
- Getting to know the cohort, facilitators, and study circle goals
- How will the study circle operate - philosophy, pedagogy and schedule?

Readings (Chose 2 to focus on):

- Videos: [Seabury Co-op Video](#)
- Readings : [Co-op Benefits](#)
- [Co-op Primer](#)
- [Co-op Principles](#)

Session 2: Co-op History

Learning Goals:

- Introduce broad co-op history as it relates to affordable housing
- Explore how the co-op model is flexible and has been used to solve problems across all areas and demographics
- Explore the history of study circles
- Discuss how co-op history connects with current challenges and solutions

Activities: Introductions. Discuss what excited you about the history you read about.

What does it suggest is possible for us?

Readings (Chose 2 to focus on):

- [History of US Co-ops](#)
- [Unions and Co-ops](#)
- [Amalgamated Homes co-ops](#)

Session 3: Chicago Co-op History

Learning Goals:

- Explore Chicago's co-op history
- Explore Chicago's history and its role in co-op history in the US
- Connect Chicago's history and co-op history to the current co-op movement and landscape of Chicago

Activities: Introductions, discuss co-op case studies and what we can learn from them

Readings (Chose 2 to focus on):

- [Chicago Co-ops](#)
- [Wicker Park](#) Co-op
- [The Castle Lost](#)
- [Where Are Chicago's Co-ops](#)

Session 4: Community Wealth Building & Housing Affordability in Chicago

Learning Goals:

- Define wealth building and affordability
 - Discuss wealth vs. affordability
- Explore housing organizing in Chicago
- Explore affordable housing co-op history in the US
- What are the tools that have been used in Chicago to create affordable housing?

Activities: Introductions. What are the benefits of shared equity? Why might you set up a limited equity housing co-op?

Readings (Chose 2 to focus on):

- [Shared Equity Housing](#)
- [What is Shared Equity Housing](#)
- [Making the Case for Shared Equity Housing](#)
- [UHAB Affordability](#)

Session 5: Overview of Starting a Co-Op

Learning Goals:

- Examine the process of starting a co-op
 - Timeline and ecosystem map
 - Roles and skills
- Current co-op opportunities in Chicago
- Connect with cohort's goals and visions

Activities: Introductions. What might some step be in exploring setting up a housing co-op?

Readings (Chose 1 to focus on):

- [Rules for Starting a Successful Housing Co-op](#)
- [Partnering with Tenant Associations](#)

Session 6: Structure and Governance of a Co-op/Democracy and Practice

Learning Goals:

- Explore structure and governance in co-ops
- Make a bridge between the study circle and next steps

- Activities: Introductions. Discuss management vs. governance
- Discuss decision making practices
- Discuss participation and leadership

Reading (Review PowerPoint and look at Section II of **CO-Operate Booklet!**)

- [Intro to Co-op Structure and Governance](#)
- [Co-operate Booklet](#)

After the Study Circle: Following the completion of the study circle course, cohort members will have a variety of different options for next steps, including:

- A continuation of the study circles based on participant interests
- Access to TA support from UHAB
- Advanced invitations to UHAB trainings and webinars
- Optional additional points of study and group projects

Overall, cohort members will have learned more about co-ops, how they function, and their role in building permanently affordable housing. Furthermore, participants will have developed deeper relationships in their ecosystem, and will hopefully have a platform from which they can expand and deepen their work in building affordable co-op housing.