

A New Free and Open Portal: Ed.Coop Resources in Co-op Teaching and Learning

BY ERIN HANCOCK

Education: for members of the cooperative business community, it matters. It's in our DNA or at least in our Fifth Principle.

Yet, however important it may be, meeting our educational needs is often a struggle. Some may lack the resources to engage with education in any capacity and watch as this value falls behind. Others may go to great lengths to develop onboarding materials or hire consultants to lead training sessions and spend major resources doing so. Either way, we could all benefit from a helping hand. At **Ed.Coop** (or ed.coop), that extra help is now just a click away.

A co-op education hub

Officially launched by the Association of Cooperative Educators (ACE) in August of 2018, the mission of Ed.Coop is to curate the co-op community's best educational content so that learners and educators alike have a central hub to access tools, curriculum, articles, videos, podcasts, and much more. Instead of starting your education project by googling or by putting resources toward developing something from scratch, you can start here.

"For several years now, ACE [ace.coop], GEO [geo.coop], and TESA [toolboxford.org] have been interested in creating some kind of clearinghouse or 'one stop shop' where anyone could go to easily find learning materials on cooperative economics. We are very excited that the site is now launched. This co-op education hub is a space where anyone who wants to deepen their knowledge of cooperatives can go to find content specific to their learning journey," says Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, ACE director and professor of Community Justice and Social Economic Development at CUNY's John Jay College. Gordon-Nembhard, author of *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, is a 2016 inductee into the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

The Association of Cooperative Educators is a North American organization of people involved in the work of co-op education—professors, human resources professionals, consultants, community organizers. ACE has been leading the charge of how to drive effective co-op education since 1970. The ACE Institute, through its annual conference, is known for bringing educators



and leaders together to showcase new initiatives, collaborate to improve education, and to inquire into what education is required to drive the cooperative economy forward.

In 2016, ACE teamed up with the TESA Collective and Grassroots Economic Organizing, and thanks to a grant from the CHS Foundation, these groups started gathering people together to determine what was most needed to advance cooperative education. Over 200 organizations and individuals participated. The discussions led to the desire to create an online platform that provides curated learning paths, co-op libraries, a listing of events—and, one day, a space for dialogue to further what is happening at in-person events.

The site has now been officially

launched at Ed.Coop under the banner of "The Cooperative Educators Network."

How it works

The site features custom learning paths that are designed for a target audience, such as board directors or new employees or people wishing to start a co-op, or on special topics such as inclusion. Each learning path contains free content (videos, articles, workshop materials) that helps advance one's co-op knowledge. Educators from the three partner organizers have scoured the co-op sphere to find the best content.

Darya Marchenkova, the TESA Collective's representative to this project, stated: "We didn't want to reinvent the wheel; we wanted to harness the brilliance of the educational materials that our fellow cooperators were already producing and bring them together into one hub, extending their reach and impact."

There was a lot to choose from. Often the most recent, succinct, well-organized, and comprehensive materials were chosen. There are even three learning paths in both Spanish and French regarding co-op basics, governance, and development.

The learning paths available currently (with many still to come) include co-op curious, government/public policy, leaders, board of directors/governance, worker co-op conversion, co-op developers, worker co-op start-ups, youth, post-secondary educators, agriculture co-ops, and inclusion.

If someone is more interested in taking their own deep dive into what is available in the co-op sphere, the site is set up for that too. Under the “Libraries” tab, there are nearly 50 channels offered for deeper learning. Here, you will see digital libraries from co-op research centers, robust resource pages from co-op association websites, and other collections.

This site may not be the ending point for co-op education, but it certainly serves as a great starting point. Daniel Arranaga, the Democracy at Work Network program manager, explained: “This has been a much-needed resource. I have been referring all my clients that are thinking about starting up a co-op or thinking of converting their business to cooperative to ed.coop. It allows me to have better followup consultations and focus on the specifics needs and questions that follow.”

If you find that you are spending a lot of time fielding questions about the co-op basics or how to start a co-op, you now have a tool in your pocket. Simply invite people to visit ed.coop and continue on the appropriate learning path for them. Once they have done that, you will elevate the type of conversations you can have.

The site will continue to grow in the coming months and years. Josh Davis, GEO’s representative to the project, shares: “We are constantly seeing new, useful tools being developed, and we want to ensure those get out to the people who can use them. The purpose of an educational portal like this is to support the co-op economy to be effective at serving members and be a resource for the wider community. Thus, we will continue outreach and communication efforts to reach more and more people.”

If you have suggestions to improve the portal, or you would like to participate in stewarding the growth of the network, please visit ed.coop or email ed@ace.coop. •

Be Part of the ACE Cooperative Educators Network

- Tell your human resources staff about the site so they can use it for employee onboarding or training.
- Make sure your board knows about the governance learning path (designed for seasoned and new directors alike).
- Stay informed about upcoming co-op educational events by visiting the events page.
- Start a study group based on articles you pick up on the site.
- Pull materials from the site to bring the 5th Principle to life at your annual meeting.
- If teachers/instructors/professors in your circles want to teach about co-ops, direct them to the “classroom educators” learning paths.
- Submit materials your co-op has developed, so your resources can be of use to other co-ops.
- Refer people to the site, so they can have access to these materials
- Offer your time or expertise to help improve the site by sharing resources that are not yet featured, or help to serve as a connector by sharing with your network, your members, and on social media.



PHOTOS: Saint Mary's University Cooperative Management Education (CME)