

Esteban Kelly Candidate Statement:

I am running for another term on the NCBA CLUSA board to continue to guide the most-recent strategic visioning and planning we have recently initiated, and to deepen the value and connectedness of the cross-sector approach in strengthening scale and impact of the cooperative business model.

As a founder of the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance, and as a contemporary executive or board leader in several key sectors—food, education, housing, and worker co-operatives—the mutual growth and benefit of cross-sector collaboration is evident. Furthermore, as lead organizer with the New Economy Coalition, I see the potential for cooperative leadership to guide a meaningful economic shift—through new flows of capital and ownership of assets, civic development through member engagement, and most importantly practiced economic democracy—in building community wealth and repurposing social and financial capital to serve workers and members. I experience this enhanced economy of mutuality and connection in Philadelphia but also at a national scale as an active director of NCBA CLUSA and the Cooperative Development Foundation.

I was appointed to the board of NCBA CLUSA in 2011 to offer a perspective from the youth and student leadership of the US cooperative movement—but since that time I have come to serve in much more than this capacity. For the last 3 years my board service has somewhat surpassed the expectations of a “youth appointee.” I am proud to speak as a respected peer on the NCBA CLUSA board, and to offer my own leadership and multi-sector experience towards furthering our collective work.

Having participated in a rebooted grounding of NCBA CLUSA, I see a fresh recognition that cross-sector collaboration is key to the next iteration of cooperative growth. There is momentum for developing a deeper connection to NCBA’s membership across the country, while embracing an invigorated approach to an emergent economic shift—one where “place” and community-ownership is re-centered throughout towns, cities, and rural areas. In particular, I perceive two ways in which NCBA CLUSA is poised to seize an important moment in our country’s emerging new economy:

First is the growing awareness—among communities, politicians, would-be entrepreneurs, and economic justice activists—of the true strength of the cooperative model to lift workers, tenants, consumers, and whole communities out of economic hardship, through a sense of “economic democracy” that is

baked into the very structure of cooperatives, regardless of industry. This is already evident in everything from post-recession trends to the 2012 acknowledgment by the United Nations. Beyond this, I can attest that the “new economy” space is rife with interest in the cooperative model as a backbone of a fundamentally just economy that centers people, place, and the planet.

Second is the recognition that the cooperative model offers a farther-reaching and more popular valance than any of us co-op “insiders” ever thought was possible; we are seeing for example the support in New York City of worker co-ops (to the tune of \$1 million dollars from America’s biggest city’s budget thanks to the work of our colleagues at NYCNoWC, Solidarity NYC, Green Worker Co-op, the Democracy at Work Institute, and the US Federation of Worker Co-ops), and an interest in new cooperative development that currently outstrips our movement’s technical capacity to support and integrate into our various sectors.

Through our process of re-grounding at NCBA CLUSA, our vision and purpose are clearer, our process and governance have become much more transparent, and the trust and alignment nurtured among board and management is on track to tap the vast potential of our country’s cooperative apex organization.

In my comments at the NCBA CLUSA boardroom, I’ve asserted and also demonstrated that the leadership of young people is not just something which we’ll eventually need, but something that the cooperative sector needs right now. Though my co-op work in education, conference planning, food justice, workplace democracy, and affordable housing, I’ve been an ambassador of the cooperative movement to younger generations as well as a direct liaison to the new audiences with whom we must connect if we are to harness a newly attentive public to our movement and its great purpose.