

It has been an honor to serve on the board of directors of NCBA, and a privilege to collaborate with co-operators from across sectors, industries and regions. I would welcome the opportunity to continue to serve our movement in this role as we build on the momentum of the Year of Co-ops toward a vision for a Co-operative Decade.

I feel fortunate to have seen the potential of the co-operative business model from many vantage points, beginning with a decade as a member of Equal Exchange, a worker co-op and pioneer in fairly traded products. This experience convinced me of both the humanistic value of co-operation and its strength as a model for sustainable enterprise. More importantly, Equal Exchange's role a part of a web of agricultural, financial and food co-ops demonstrated to me the potential of "co-operation among co-ops" as a principle and an effective strategy for economic development and social entrepreneurship.

My passion for co-operation led me to pursue a Master of Management: Co-operatives and Credit Unions from St. Mary's University. This gave me the opportunity to learn about successful co-operative models and strategies from around the world, which I have been able to apply to my work with the Valley Alliance of Worker Co-ops and the Neighboring Food Co-op Association.

Finally, my time on the board of directors of NCBA has enabled me to see the possibilities for the movement in the U.S. Each of our sectors holds a piece of the puzzle as we seek to expand our impact and empower people to improve their lives and communities. But it is the space between our co-ops — the opportunities we have for collaboration within and across industries — where we can see the potential for a co-operative economy, grounded in our shared values, principles and business model.

Since the global recession began five years ago, our movement has been presented with a unique opportunity to present a viable alternative. During my time on the board, I have remained focused on the central question of how we leverage the shared strength of our co-ops and credit unions to grow co-operative enterprise, influence public policy, engage the academic community and enrich the lives of people of all backgrounds, in both urban and rural communities. On the local level, I was a founding board member of the Valley Co-operative Business Association (VCBA), a model for regional cross sector collaboration that seeks to extend the work of the NCBA to the local level.

People are hungry for a different approach to business, and it is up to us to present a vision for the future. I believe that the NCBA is on this path, and it would be an honor to continue to serve our movement on the board of directors as we move forward. Thank-you.

Erbin Crowell