

CO-OPERATIVE CANBERRA

INTRODUCTION

We want Canberra to be a thriving co-operative city, that builds economic opportunities for the local community and encourages business that is community-centred and responsible. [Co-operatives are values driven, community-based, democratic organisations that are owned and controlled by their workers and people who use their services.](#) They are more resilient in economic downturn, creating and supporting jobs and wealth that stays in the community.

Privately-owned companies are the dominant way of doing business in Australia. Often this means that the benefits of cooperatives for workers, users, suppliers and the community at large are [almost unknown and often misunderstood.](#) Co-operatives put the control of the business in the hands of their members - the people who run, staff and use the business, rather than shareholders whose only interest is in maximising profit. This makes co-operatives more responsive, flexible and in touch with the community they serve. It also means a better deal for workers who might be disempowered or disadvantaged by regular business structures. A recent local example is [Harmony Community Cleaning,](#) which was [established by refugee workers who had been underpaid by their previous employer.](#)

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen [mutual aid groups form to support people who are disadvantaged or who require special assistance.](#) These are an example of the co-operative social structures and sharing networks that communities instinctively build in times of hardship. The challenge is to support these common good instincts in business through better support for co-operatives.

THAT'S WHY THE ACT GREENS WILL SUPPORT COOPERATIVES TO BUILD A BETTER NORMAL, BY:

1. allocating **\$10 million for interest free seed funding loans for the formation of co-operatives** or the transformation of businesses into co-operatives
2. employ **an additional two full time staff members through Access Canberra to help advise and support the establishment and development of co-operatives**
3. require **worker and consumer representation on the board of every ACT territory owned corporation or Government business**
4. investigate **mechanisms to support workers to transition into co-operative ownership of a business**
5. establish a **sister city relationship with Bologna**, Italy which is leading the world in co-operative industry to learn about the benefits of co-operative business and mutual support networks

1. ALLOCATING \$10 MILLION FOR INTEREST FREE SEED FUNDING LOANS FOR THE FORMATION OF CO-OPERATIVES OR THE TRANSFORMATION OF BUSINESSES INTO CO-OPERATIVES

The Greens will establish a fund of \$10 million over four years in interest free loans and grants to support the formation of locally operating co-operatives in Canberra.

We know that [co-operatives should be actively promoted as a possible operation for service delivery](#) particularly where community based initiatives are being considered, and that Governments should be developing programs of support to establish new co-operatives and mutual enterprises.

However, co-operatives looking to set up often have trouble securing loans from banks and otherwise raising capital because they have a distributed ownership structure.

A seed investment and interest free loan funds will help co-operatives in their initial start up phase, providing capital to get them off the ground. The fund will also be available to help businesses who wish to transition into a co-operative structure to do so.

2. EMPLOY AN ADDITIONAL TWO FULL TIME STAFF MEMBERS THROUGH ACCESS CANBERRA TO HELP ADVISE AND SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATIVES

The Greens will employ an additional two, dedicated full time staff members in Access Canberra, to help advise and support the establishment and development of co-ops.

These positions will be tasked with talking to successful co-ops in the ACT about what works, why it works and hosting workshops for local interested businesses and communities to talk to local and small businesses about [the benefits of the co-operative structure, especially in light of the impact of COVID](#). The positions will also provide training in some of the governance, reporting and management responsibilities of co-ops so that people are empowered to help their co-op compete and thrive.

3. REQUIRE WORKER AND CONSUMER REPRESENTATION ON THE BOARD OF EVERY ACT TERRITORY OWNED CORPORATION OR GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Greens believe that businesses are better run when they are informed by diverse perspectives and views. We know that it isn't just directors or shareholders that have an interest in the operations and direction of a business. It's also the workers and the consumers of the business's services who work every day to serve the business. The Greens believe that these groups should also have a voice in the governance of a business. The Greens will amend legislation and company documents to require worker and consumer representation on the board of every ACT territory owned corporation or Government business.

4. INVESTIGATE MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT WORKERS TO TRANSITION INTO CO-OPERATIVE OWNERSHIP OF A BUSINESS

The Greens want workers that are invested and valued in their employment. Stable, secure work provides dignity and opportunity. The Greens want to explore ways of supporting workers to transition into co-operative ownership of a business, potentially through a 'right of first refusal' which gives workers employed by the business the first opportunity to buy it if it is put up for sale, or by providing clauses in lease arrangements that allow workers an option to maintain a leased space if their employer goes into administration.

5. ESTABLISH A SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP WITH BOLOGNA, ITALY WHICH IS LEADING THE WORLD IN CO-OPERATIVE INDUSTRY TO LEARN ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF CO-OPERATIVE BUSINESS AND MUTUAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Bologna is renowned for its [strong network of co-operative businesses](#) that [produce a third of its gross domestic product](#) and where two out of every three workers is a co-operative member. In this city, co-operatives provide important social services like housing, early education and aged care in a way that eliminates centralised bureaucracy and builds relationships between workers providing services and the consumers of the services. A sister city relationship would support knowledge exchange between Canberra and Bologna and help Canberra become a co-operative city.