

Esteban Kelly

Candidate Statement

I'm excited to be seeking re-election to the NCBA/CLUSA Board of Directors after three full terms of service to this country's cross-sector cooperative movement's apex organization. As the Executive Director of the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC), I bring voice to the worker co-op sector and connections to our networks and advocacy efforts at the grassroots. As a leader in what is currently the most rapidly growing co-op sector in the U.S. by many measures, I am keenly aware of how critical the cooperative business model is to the just, sustainable and equitable society we are trying to create.

My leadership on the NCBA/CLUSA Board of Directors has served to ensure that NCBA/CLUSA advocates for an inclusive economy with an impact far larger than its size. The Main Street Employee Ownership Act is a prime example of that. During my last term, NCBA/CLUSA and the USFWC built a coalition bringing sustainable business allies and employee ownership associations to the table with the co-op sector to get the first piece of new co-op legislation in 20 years passed by Congress and signed into law. At the core of that effort is the principled and strategic unlocking of a special partnership. By matching the scale and diversity of the co-op field and fueling it with the momentum of the worker co-op sector, we're able to realize policy dreams that had previously stagnated. What's more, it's essential that we act. Cooperatives don't just build a better world; they can re-build the communities that have been devastated by the dominant economic system, and the rural people and exploited urban communities left behind during recent decades of "economic progress."

My background in cooperatives is thoroughly cross-sector, particularly in housing, education, grocery/food, student, multi-stakeholder and, of course, worker co-op sectors. I also have some experience as a member of several credit unions and a sustainable electricity co-op in Philadelphia. For the last 15 years, I've stayed engaged in international co-op organizing as well. Last year I was elected to the board of CICOPA, the worker co-op sectorial association within the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Here, my fluency in Spanish and Portuguese, and proficiency in French and Italian have come in handy.

As worker co-ops grow, we all grow. As grassroots worker-owners push for policy changes at the county, state, municipal or regional level, all cooperatives benefit through a better understanding of our model and its success. And finally, as a founding worker-owner of AORTA, a worker co-op dedicated to facilitation (as well as education and consulting), I bring extra skills where appropriate to ease group dynamics and governance processes that are essential to healthy group function. I'm pleased with the progress NCBA/CLUSA has made since I joined the board nine years ago and am excited about where we're taking cooperative solutions as we tackle the problems of an emerging 21st century economy.