

ISA FERNANDEZ

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

In San Antonio, Texas, we have limited access to cooperatives. This is reflected in the attached letter stating the fact that I have been a member for 25 years with my credit union, and they wish me well, which is not a typical endorsement. The support I have been given from the University of Texas at San Antonio Institute for Economic Development Small Business Development Center (SBDC) leadership, however, relays the fact that the SBDC (funded by the Small Business Administration and State of Texas) is supportive of my goals.

Given the fact that our city, the seventh largest in the country, has a population that is majority-minority, with a higher than national average rate of people living in poverty, and with disabilities, the city is ripe to reap the benefits of cooperative development.

My clients are working class people who face the challenges of job and income instability. They are creative, hopeful and entrepreneurial. Most of my clients work multiple jobs just to survive. Many are a racial or ethnic minority, many are women, more than a few are neurodiverse, others disabled, and all are eager to create a life that provides sustainability and balance. These are people who have decided to create opportunities for themselves, because finding jobs that provide livable wages, where there is high employee morale and you are treated well, is difficult. I work with people who form their businesses out of necessity, not solely because they have entrepreneurial spirits. These are individuals that could benefit greatly from the cooperative business model.

In my role as a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Certified Business Advisor, I have made it a priority to share ground-up cooperative development and legacy business transition information with clients and colleagues. My work as co-chair with America's Small Business Development Center (ASBDC) has given me a unique opportunity to help branch out these models to the SBDC South-West, and to national colleagues of the SBDC. I am currently working alongside my ASBDC Business Transition and Employee Ownership committee co-chair with the Democracy at Work Institute to provide organizational co-branded Workers to Owners training for SBDC staff. It is important to me to provide innovative, progressive content to my clients and my colleagues, and I am appreciative of the opportunity to expand this and future work further with NCBA CLUSA.

Given my commitment to working for the community and my lived experience as a neurodiverse Latina with a background of family businesses (knowing all too well the challenges and opportunities), I believe I would bring a unique perspective to the board. I would be honored to work alongside others, as innovative and thoughtful as possible, to support the goals of NCBA CLUSA.