

ESTEBAN KELLY

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

Having recently completed a two-year term as chair of NCBA CLUSA's Board of Directors, I'm excited to be seeking re-election, building on 15 years of service to our country's cross-sector cooperative movement's apex organization. These days, as the Executive Director of the U.S. Federation of Worker Co-ops (USFWC), I connect NCBA to the worker co-op sector and to the momentum we've built through our community and advocacy efforts at the grassroots.

Over my last few election cycles, I illustrated how NCBA CLUSA and the USFWC built a coalition bringing sustainable business allies and employee ownership associations under one tent to affect legislative action. Just last October at the Co-op IMPACT Conference in Washington, DC, I was part of a Hill Hike in which we advocated for appropriations for the WORK Act that our coalition pushed over the line at the end of 2022. Now in 2026, that law is finally receiving appropriations to fund state employee ownership centers, in a Congressional win just four months following our meetings with policymakers on the matter. At the core of these effort lies the principled and strategic commitment to a special partnership. By matching the scale and diversity of the co-op field and fueling it with the passion of the worker co-op sector, we're able to support communities using cooperative businesses to sustain themselves through an increasingly volatile economy.

My background in cooperatives is thoroughly cross-sector, particularly in housing, education, grocery/food, youth/student, multi-stakeholder and of course worker co-op sectors. I have also been a proud member of several credit unions and a sustainable electricity co-op in Philadelphia. For the last 25 years, I've stayed engaged in international co-op organizing as well. As NCBA's board chair, I joined our CEO and a delegation of NCBA members and directors to represent the U.S. at the General Assembly for the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in New Delhi. I also represent our country on the board of CICOPA, the international association for industrial, artisanal and service (a.k.a. "worker-owned") co-ops.

Even in the context of an association that has endured as long as NCBA CLUSA, this has been among the most challenging moments for our sustainability, inflicting tectonic shifts to our business model. I attribute our resilience to the stalwart leadership of our CEO Doug O'Brien and the close partnership the board and I have built with him. I would be honored to serve another term as we forge a viable path forward, one that delivers the impact our mission promises to the field.