

## A Case for Co-Ops

### Executive Summary

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A Case for Co-Ops is a digital media outreach project that is intended to explore methods for increasing the impact of sustainability solutions, by helping to translate research implications into practical approaches for sustainable business design. The status quo for enterprise, often referred to as Business As Usual, is not a sustainable model. In fact, many have argued that the challenges we are facing today in our societies and with the planet's ecosystem have been overwhelmingly driven by economic endeavors. In the pursuit of maximizing the efficiency of an enterprise's ability to produce profits, many of these endeavors have externalized the social and environmental costs that are often connected to cheaper supply chains, rapid production processes, and linear waste streams. And while Business As Usual may be the leading proponent for the unsustainable conditions that we must now correct, the pursuit of economic opportunity does not have to be.

A Case for Co-Ops is the result of my collaboration with project partners within Arizona State University's School of Sustainability and entrepreneurs from the Phoenix-metropolitan area. Together, we share a vision of economic activity that does not advance social conflict and environmental degradation. We believe that the shortcomings of Business As Usual are the result of incomplete considerations during the design iterations of the business models that have led to our current sustainability crisis, and therefore designing and proliferating alternative business models by utilizing state-of-the-art knowledge in the field of sustainability is a necessary condition for solving the crisis.

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With this mission, my ASU partners created an incubator program designed to produce a worker-owned cooperative beverage company in Phoenix that would incorporate sustainability principles throughout the organization. These principles include supply considerations, such as locally sourcing native ingredients and procuring refillable product containers; production and distribution considerations such as biodegradable packaging and bicycle delivery; and waste considerations such as recycling and composting. My ASU partners empowered their cohort of entrepreneurs to make these decisions on their own as a team, by providing them with various findings from sustainability research as consultation.

For my part of the collaboration, I provided creative strategies for increasing the awareness of my project partners' work and for delivering messaging aimed at attracting additional recruits for future offerings of the incubator program. To achieve this, I documented the incubator process from inception and design to delivery. Combining this footage and exclusive interviews with leading sustainability researchers, scholars, and professionals, I produced a documentary film showcasing design considerations for the creation of a sustainable business model. This film strengthens my project partners' proposition to imagine alternative business models by complementing the conceptual sustainability benefits with the practical plausibility of a real-world example.

Additionally, I created a website to host the documentary and other related media. This media includes videos that I produced, such as a persuasive introductory video advocating for my project partners' vision and mission, and extended cuts of interviews with subject matter expert that were conducted for the documentary. Furthermore, the website provides a library of supplementary literature and video resources related to sustainable alternative business models, such as social enterprises, benefit corporations, and worker-owned cooperatives for individuals who feel enticed to learn more. Finally, I worked with my collaborators to include simplified components from the incubator program curriculum on the website, making key sustainability design considerations accessible to everyone, and to promote enrollment for future cohorts.

A Case for Co-Ops implements strategic communication strategies to provide my project partners a comprehensive campaign for impassioning and motivating recruits for their sustainable business incubator program. While many test-audience subjects who viewed a ten-minute

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demonstration of this campaign reported positive responses including excitement, eagerness to learn more, and questions about collaborating with their organizations to make similar work, there were also a few negative responses. These responses included confusion regarding the user interface design of the website components; questioning how users arrive at websites; what visitors are expected to do with the business design principles provided; and apprehension toward my project partners' solution for which I was advocating.

Moving forward, I will continue to document the fledgling business created by my project partners. I will conduct follow-up interviews, and I will record sustainability performance measure indicators to compare against intended outcomes to evaluate success. I will also continue to adapt the website to appeal to a broader audience. I will attempt this by producing multiple videos, taking advantage of overlapping values amongst varying worldviews, that highlight the parallels between the viewer's and my project partners' vision. These videos, as well as the original persuasive video, will be hosted off-site and will be disseminated through social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook. These applications incentivize users to share media that comports with their shared network's values. Adapting my narrative to appeal to social media users across the political spectrum will allow me to utilize algorithmic strategies for driving diverse traffic to the website.