The Village Cooperative Market of Williamsville, Inc.

4 Cornerstones: Vision | Talent | Capital | Systems





Member Threshold: 300

- · Created vision to satisfy a need in the community
- · Primary feasibility assessed
- · Community support demonstrated for the idea
- Legal work done to prepare for incorporation
- · Founding documents established: by-laws, membership
- · Organizational structure established: founding Board, Project Manager, Committees
- · Grant received from County for \$7,000 (County Legislative Rath and Loughran)
- Grand received from Amherst IDA for \$5K
- Board, Project Manager & Committees set to understand cooperatives, the development model, committed to working toward best chance of long-term success
- · 300 member-owner (MO) threshold achieved!

STAGE

FEASIBILITY & PLANNING

Member Threshold: 600

STAGE 2A - Feasibility

- Received \$10K match grant from FCI
- Market study conducted
- Established preliminary financial systems for bookkeeping
- Engaged industryspecific support for guidance in developing the project
- Commercial realtor contracted
- Board engaged an advisor for guidance in building governance foundation
- Ties with community broadened
- 500 MO threshold achieved!

STAGE 2B - Planning

- Finalized site evaluation
- Business plan and pro forma developed and refined
- Made plans and preparations to launch capital campaign
- Prepared to secure site with contingencies
- Planned General Manager search process
- 600 MO threshold achieved!

Key Decision Point: The "go/no go line"

Do we have sufficient internal readiness, member, community, financial support and at right site to approve signing a lease with contingencies? If we don't raise enough money or recruit enough members, we can still turn back.

STAGE **IMPLEMENTATION**

Member Threshold - 1.500

STAGE 3A Preconstruction

Member Threshold: 800

- Announced site
- Completed capital campaign
- Collected funds
- Secured financing
- Began store design
- Development bids
- Launched General Manager search
- Contracted with Project Facilities Mgr to oversee construction
- 800 MO threshold achieved

STAGE 3C - Prepare for Opening

STAGE 3B - Construction Renovation

Member Threshold: 1,000

- Began demo
- Hired General Manager
- Construction: complete bids, oversee construction, equipment acquisition
- **Build business** relationships
- Develop plans for membership, merchandising, marketing, promotions and staffing
- Develop systems for the store operations
- 1.000 MO threshold achieved!

1.500

- · Build org and operational capacity Implement staffing, marketing and
- membership program plans
- 1.500 MO threshold achieved!

Key Decision Point: The "point of no return"

Is there sufficient capacity in all 4 cornerstones (vision, talent, capital and systems) to launch the business operation?

2018 2022 2017 2019 2020 2021



Build a Shared Vision

- Identify the needs to be met
- □ Visit Co-ops
- ☐ Find a mentor co-op
- □ Gather Information:
 - □ "How to Start a Food Co-op"
 - □ FAQ's (CDS Consulting Co-op)
 - □ "Cooperatives, A Tool for Community Economic Development" (UWCC)
 - Cooperative Grocer archives
 - □ View "A Co-op in Your Community" PPT presentation
- Contact regional cooperative development centers
- Communicate your ideas

Conduct Community Meetings

- ☐ Introduce the idea of a food co-op
- Recruit others who share the vision and are willing to dedicate time to development of a food co-op
- Build awareness and support

Identify Potential Members

- Among others, consider:
 - Natural food shoppers
 - People who want good food in a community atmosphere
 - Supporters of the co-op model
 - □ Local producers and their customers
 - People with special diets (gluten- free, vegan, etc.)

Identify Community Leaders

- □ Look for:
 - Recognized voices in your community
 - □ Visionaries & Change Agents
 - Politically connected
 - Organizations with social missions

Create an Effective Organization

- □ Recruit/identify leaders
- Act on behalf of the future members until a board of directors is elected
- □ Promote the vision
- Recruit and direct other helpers
- Create a structure for on-going communication and meetings with members

Setup Task Forces

- These are smaller groups of steering committee members and volunteers
- Ensure clear expectations and accountability
- □ Areas to cover may include:
 - □ Fundraising
 - Membership
 - community outreach
 - □ incorporation

Find People to Help

- □ Recruit volunteers
 (in addition to
 those on the board
 & steering
 committee) for:
 - □ Task force activities
 - □ Special events
 - Potential members
 - Civic promotors
- Identify talents and resources within your membership & community

Setup Basic Office/Admin Support

- □ Phone/fax line(s)
- □ E-mail address
- Website
- Person or persons who will keep track of decisions, reports, etc.

Find Graphics/ Web Designer

- Volunteer or paid person who can create effective presentations
- Website developer/designer

Determine Organizing Budget

- Initial budget for the organizing stage includes:
 - □ Copying/mailing
 - Costs for public meetings
 - Communications
- Preliminary Sources& Uses Budget

Commit Resources

- Use founder donations
- Define acceptable use for membership investments

Setup Financial Accountability Systems

- Assign checkwriting responsibility and oversight
- Create auditable tracking systems
- Designate spending authority and budgets

for Organizational Costs

 Seek out local community development grants and other grant opportunities

Raise Money Locally to Meet Required Matching Funds

- Approach strong supporters of the co- op's mission (food justice groups, local producers, etc.)
- Collect donations from organizers and public meetings
- Use funds from early memberships

SYSTEMS

Create a Development Plan

- □ Budget
- □ Timeline
- □ Create task forces
- □ Concept Policy & Parameters

Incorporate

- ☐ File Articles of Incorporation
- ☐ Seat Founding Board

Implement Communication Systems

- □ Set up a web site
- Create info flyers
- Develop a steering committee communications system
 - □ e-mail groups
 - records of decisions, members, leads, etc.

Conduct Customer/ Member Survey

- □ Survey community at large (helps bring recognition to the effort)
- Identify the range of goods and services desired (helps to refine store concept and vision)

Setup Acctg System and Checking Acct

- Open checking/ savings account for co-op funds
- □ Set up accounting system sufficient for tracking member equity and loan investments, other income and organizational costs

Create Contact List

- □ This should be a database that includes names, phone #'s, e-mail, & notes about the person's interest in the co-op
- Include all inquiries, attendees at public meetings, volunteers, members, and anyone else whose interest is known

Define Steering Committee & Decision-Making Process

- Discuss & agree on roles & responsibilities of the steering comm.
- DOCUMENT them
- Set policy on how decision-making will occur
- Create systems of reporting & accountability
- Assign responsibility for keeping records

Research Member Programs & Bylaws

- Consider member benefits, education & outreach options, discounts (if any) that you would like to offer
- See: Best Practices for Membership and Marketing in Food Co-ops
- Review by-law options & determine member equity and loan requirements

Conduct a Preliminary Feasibility Study

- Begin to asses feasibility for a successful store
- Identify market segments
- Review initial indicators of store size and product mix

DECISION POINT:

Are your cornerstones: Vision, Talent, Capital, and Systems solid and strong enough to support a successful organizing effort?