DC University

2027 Cohort Application

Development Cooperative

Application deadline: December 15, 2026

Program dates: March – September 2027

Format: Hybrid



Program Information

DC University (DC U) is a seven-month hybrid learning program for startup food cooperatives that aim to strengthen their business concept and deepen their understanding of grocery food cooperative development. Through this guided journey learning, peer idea exchange, industry expertise, grocery cooperative visits, and applied work, DC U will support startups moving from vision to viability.

DC U is designed for startups ready to actively engage in the development process. Participants will leave with a stronger understanding of their business concept, greater clarity about the path to NCG members, and connections to people and resources that can support their continued development.

Program Schedule & Participant Commitment

Participants should anticipate the following commitments:

- **Program schedule:** March–September 2027
- **Learning format:** Six months of virtual instruction plus one month featuring in-person learning experiences
- **Participation:** Attendance and active engagement in scheduled learning sessions, peer discussions, assignments, and applied learning activities
- **Travel:** Participants should anticipate travel associated with the in-person learning experience scheduled for May 10-12, 2027, in St. Paul, MN
- **Additional learning:** Participants will be expected to complete assignments and a capstone project that applies program concepts to their cooperative development work

Participants should plan to dedicate the time necessary to fully engage in the program and collaborate with their cohort. Additional details regarding the session calendar, learning expectations, and travel arrangements will be shared with selected participants.

Program Schedule & Participant Commitment

DC University represents an investment in the next generation of cooperative grocery leaders and organizers. The program is designed to make high-quality cooperative development education and resources more accessible to emerging food cooperatives.

Program Fee: $2,400 per startup (includes participation for up to three individuals from the organization). DC U graduates will receive a $2,400 credit towards future NCG Business Expansion services within 12 months after program completion.

Travel & Accommodations: DC U will provide travel, lodging, and meals for participants during the in-person learning experience.

There are no additional costs beyond those outlined above unless otherwise communicated. Additional information about payment and participant financial responsibilities will be provided upon acceptance.

Your complete application should include the following items

- ◯ Completed Program Application Form
- ◯ Co-op Business Concept
- ◯ Co-op Articles of Incorporation
- ◯ Co-op Bylaws
- ◯ Preliminary Market Assessment
- ◯ Board/leadership commitment to participation

We understand that organizations may be at different stages of development and welcome the opportunity to discuss your circumstances and identify a path forward. If you are unable to provide any of the requested documentation or have questions or concerns about the application requirements, please don't hesitate to reach out to allanah.hines@ncgdc.coop.

Program Application

Part 1: About Your Co-op

Co-op Information

CO-OP NAME

WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA (IF AVAILABLE)

ORGANIZING LOCATION - CITY | ORGANIZING LOCATION - STATE | INCORPORATED DATE

ADDRESS (IF AVAILABLE)

Contact Information

PRIMARY CONTACT NAME | ROLE

EMAIL | PHONE

How would you describe your startup co-op in 2-3 sentences?

FCI Stage of Development (Check one)

- ◯ FCI Stage 1
- ◯ FCI Stage 2
- ◯ FCI Stage 3
- ◯ FCI Stage 4
- ◯ Other (Please explain)

Does your co-op currently have:

- ◯ Articles of incorporation
- ◯ Bylaws
- ◯ An active Board
- ◯ Identified contact person
- ◯ Completed FCI Stage 1 PLG
- ◯ Completed or in-progress FCI Stage 2 PLG
- ◯ Completed or in-progress FCI Stage 3 PLG
- ◯ Completed or in-progress FCI Stage 4 PLG
- ◯ Completed pre-feasibility market assessment
- ◯ Written business concept
- ◯ Written business plan

Part 2: Your Community and Vision

What community is your co-op organizing to serve?

What is your vision for the co-op?

Why is now the right time to move this work forward?

What have you learned so far about your community's interest in and need for a food co-op?

Part 3: Your Business Concept

Remember to include your current Business Concept using the DC template or another format that clearly addresses the questions below (PDF preferred). Your Business Concept does not need to be a completed business plan. We are interested in understanding how you currently envision the co-op and the thinking behind your concept.

Your Business Concept should address, at minimum:

- **Purpose:** What problem or opportunity is the co-op responding to?
- **Customers and community:** Who will the co-op serve?
- **Value proposition:** What will the co-op offer that is meaningful to its customers and community?
- **Products/services:** What do you envision the co-op selling or providing?
- **Location:** Where do you envision the co-op operating, and what do you know about the location or area?
- **Format and footprint:** What type and size of store or operation are you considering?
- **Ownership:** What is your planned ownership structure and how do you envision building member ownership?
- **Operations:** What are you beginning to understand about how the co-op will operate?
- **Revenue model:** How do you anticipate the co-op generating revenue?
- **Community impact:** What outcomes do you hope the co-op will create?
- **Key assumptions:** What are the most important things you still need to learn or validate?

What parts of your Business Concept feel most developed?

What parts of your Business Concept are you least certain about?

What questions do you most want to answer during DC U?

Part 4: Preliminary Market Assessment

Remember to include your Preliminary Market Assessment. This does not need to be a full market study. We are looking for your current understanding of the market and the evidence you are using to inform your concept.

Your assessment should address, as applicable:

- Community demographics and characteristics
- Food access and retail environment
- Existing grocery and food retailers
- Potential customer/member base
- Competition and complementary businesses
- Community demand or interest
- Relevant economic or market conditions
- Potential trade area
- Key opportunities
- Key challenges or risks
- Questions that require additional research

What have you learned from your Preliminary Market Assessment that has influenced your Business Concept?

What questions about your market remain unanswered?

How confident are you in your current understanding of the market?

- ◯ Very confident
- ◯ Somewhat confident
- ◯ Still developing
- ◯ We have significant questions (Please explain your response in the space below.)

Part 5: Readiness & Development

Why is your co-op interested in participating in DC U now?

What would make DC U valuable to your co-op?

What are the three most important things your co-op needs to learn or accomplish over the next 12 months?

What support are you currently receiving?

What additional support do you anticipate needing after DC U?

Part 6: Participation & Commitment

DC U is designed as an active learning experience. Participants will be expected to attend sessions, complete assignments, participate in peer learning, engage with instructors and industry experts, and apply what they learn to their own co-op.

Can your co-op commit to no more than three members consistently participating throughout the program?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ We anticipate some challenges
- ◯ We are unsure (Please explain)

Who will participate in DC U on behalf of your co-op? (maximum of 3 participants)

Participant 1:

NAME

ROLE

EMAIL

Participant 2:

NAME

ROLE

EMAIL

Participant 3:

NAME

ROLE

EMAIL

What support will this person or persons have from the co-op's Board and leadership?

Can your designated participant commit to: (select all that apply)

- ◯ Attending at least six program sessions
- ◯ Participating in virtual learning sessions
- ◯ Completing assignments between sessions
- ◯ Participating in peer learning and discussion
- ◯ Participating in required in-person programming
- ◯ Completing the DC U capstone/culminating work

Part 7: Your Goals for DC University

Imagine your co-op has completed DC U. What would you like to be different in your co-op development?

What would make you say, "DC U was worth the investment of our time"?

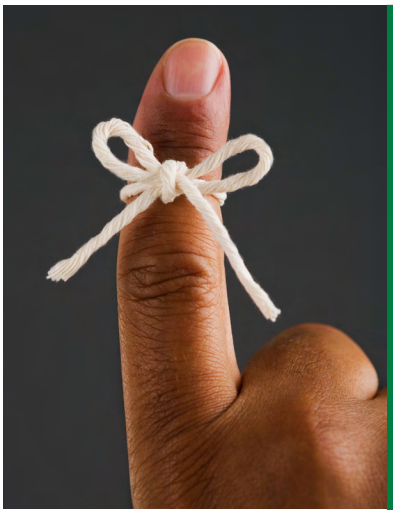
Is there anything else you would like the us to know about your co-op, community, or readiness to participate?

Part 8: Application Confirmation

By submitting this application, I confirm that the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that our co-op is prepared to actively participate in DC University if selected.

PRIMARY CONTACT NAME

DATE



Remember to complete your application and send all items to allanah.hines@ncgdc.coop

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