

# Healthy Cooperatives Build Healthy Communities

NAHC Reno Conference, October 2012

[www.newcommunityvision.coop](http://www.newcommunityvision.coop)

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## **Premise:**

As the economy recovers more slowly than we hoped, every community in the country is stretched. The stress of struggling with employment, housing, education, child and elder care, health care, even putting food on the table, spills over to our schools, police and fire departments, neighborhood organizations and houses of worship. Durable solutions to these significant problems must come from within our communities because they aren't coming from Washington or Wall Street any time soon. Although communities are rich in resources, often they are unrecognized, and, therefore, untapped.

Fortunately, we have an app for that! Gathering as a community with intention, in an environment in which each person is valued and their contribution celebrated, is the fertile environment in which relationships and ideas flourish. Communities where neighbors know each other are friendlier, safer and rich in resources beyond the monetary spectrum.

NCV's method is to create the infrastructure that fosters social capital and community spirit, the foundation of healthy communities. Communities with solid foundations are far more likely to brainstorm expansively and creatively for solutions with the potential for job creation, improved health, affordable care for the vulnerable, and more.

## **We believe that there are three key elements to the infrastructure:**

**Mixing:** Facilitating monthly community gatherings –mixers – to meet others, to have fun, to encourage neighborliness, and to nurture relationships in an environment that fosters synergistic problem solving and empowers communities to utilize their unique resources to create solutions that meet their own needs.

**Educating:** Our dramatically changed culture calls for a new approach which cooperatives are particularly suited to deliver. The challenge of meeting the baseline needs of housing, nourishing food, health care and education is complicated by political divisiveness that has weakened our economy. Meeting these needs cooperatively is not only our best shot, it is well within our reach.

**Connecting:** Connecting members with each other, and providing access to experts to support the initiatives that communities undertake, is critical to getting results. Current technology makes this more possible than ever before.

We have worked to develop a database for members to maintain their own profile that includes basic data as well as what they have to offer, such as skill with cars, with children, or a spare bedroom. It can also include what members seek, such as a stand-in grandma, someone to shovel the walk, or help with computers.

Two groups of experts have important roles: social service professionals to lubricate the social bonds for friendlier, higher functioning neighborhoods and co-op technicians to facilitate co-op formation and access to sources of capital. Co-ops that involve money need to be established with prudent business plans and bylaws to insure long term success. Co-op technicians help navigate the process, identify potential funding sources and provide a solid foundation to build upon.

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The familiar childhood song, *The more we get together.... the happier we'll be / 'Cause your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends...* expresses the fact that getting together often, and broadening the circle of friendship, creates happiness. Experiencing a sense of community and belonging is how human beings are meant to live.

Unfortunately, in our increasingly isolated culture there are few opportunities to gather with our neighbors casually and often. Without casual social interaction, people are prone to loneliness, the breeding ground for suspicion, self-doubt and the awkward feeling of not fitting in. This can deteriorate into severe mental illness with tragic and potentially deadly consequences that we have seen too often. The offset to isolation is cultivating opportunities, including mixers, to foster social capital, the breeding ground for friendly, responsive, resourceful communities.

New Community Vision promotes the cooperative business model to address our unmet needs for housing, jobs, goods and services that the conventional market place does not perceive as profitable. This is the challenge and the invitation: to meet the real needs of real people with a broad range of remedies, including those beyond the monetary realm. Cooperatives, designed to meet members' needs, can be whatever members decide they want, need and are willing to commit the energy and resources into creating.

Gathering regularly to nurture strong, resourceful communities is the way to achieve healthy communities in which people thrive.