



Co-op Cafe

CONNECT • SHARE • LEARN

Stronger Together

Balancing Autonomy & Collective Power

Jefferson, ME

March 29, 2026



Columinate



RISING TIDE CO-OP



PORTLAND FOOD CO-OP
COMMUNITY OWNED MARKET





World Cafe Principles & Guidelines

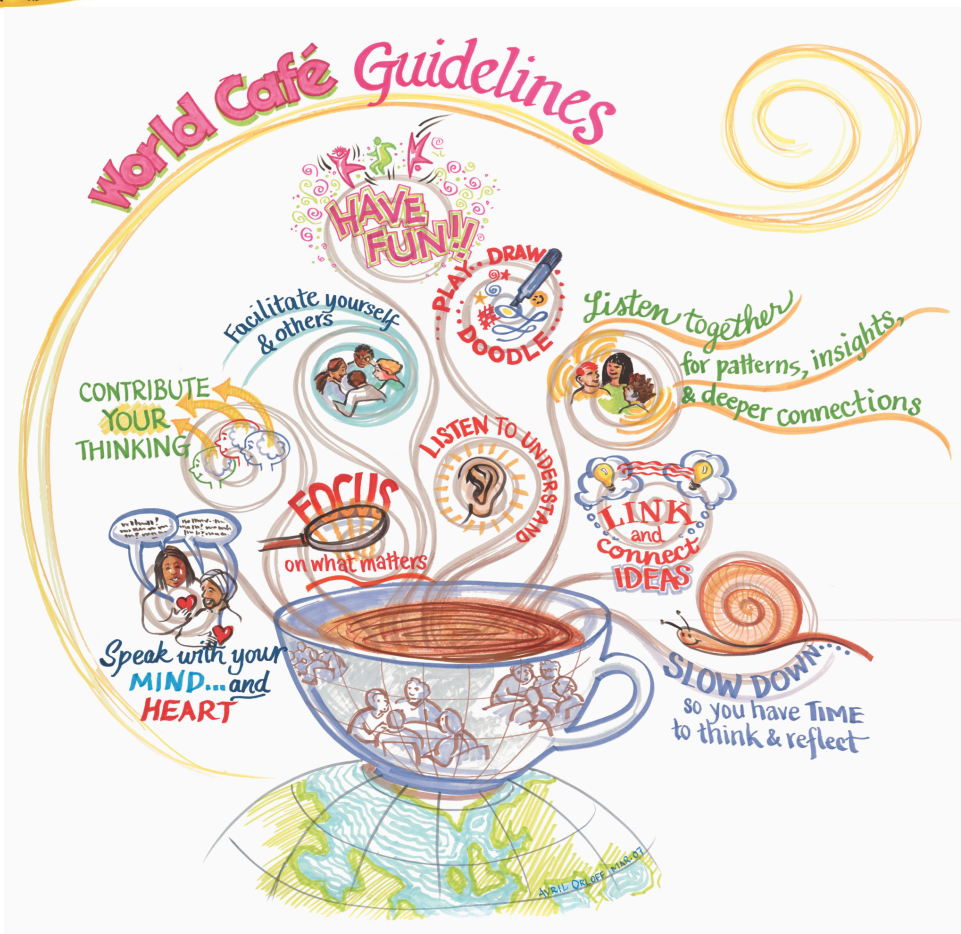
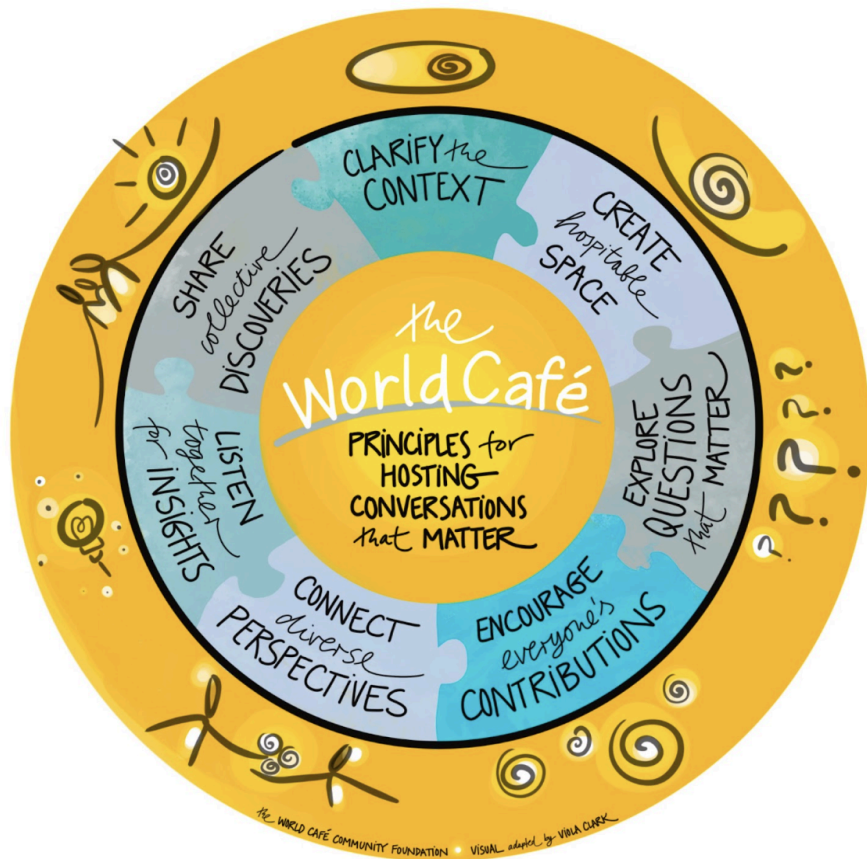




Table of Contents

World Cafe Principles & Guidelines.....1

Agenda.....3

About Our Host, Rising Tide Co-op.....4

About Our Host, Portland Food Co-op..... 5

About Our Sponsor -NCG - National Co+op Grocers..... 6

About Our Sponsor - NCG Development Co+operative.....7

Indigenous Land Acknowledgment..... 8

Honoring our Ancestors.....9

Gratitude for the Food.....10

Community Agreements..... 11

Co-op Principles..... 12

P4 & P6 Reflection Notes..... 14

Presenters..... 15

 Dave Olson..... 15

 Jonah Fertig-Burd..... 15

 Khadija El Barkaoui, PhD..... 16

Notes..... 17

Small Group Conversation Guide..... 18

Notes..... 19

Resources..... 20

Your Facilitators..... 21

 Desiree Nicole Lester..... 21

 Hether Jonna..... 21

Notes..... 22

Co-op Cafe Feedback..... 26



Agenda

1. **Welcome & Introductions**
2. **Land Acknowledgement & Honoring our Ancestors**
3. **Community Agreements**
4. **Principle 4 – Autonomy and Independence**
5. **Presenters**
 - Dave Olson, NCG
 - Jonah Fertig-Burd
6. **Break**
7. **Small Group Discussions – about today’s theme**
Autonomy vs. Collective Power
8. **Intro to World Cafe**
9. **Lunch at 12:30p**
10. **Continuums of Perspective**
11. **Tea Ceremony with Khadija Barkaoui**
12. **World Cafe Small Group Discussions**
Topics generated by YOU!
13. **Takeaways and Learnings**
14. **Evaluations**
15. **Closing**



About Our Host, Rising Tide Co-op



Rising Tide Co-op, located in the historic village of Damariscotta, is a cooperatively-owned natural grocery that has been providing the best local, natural, and organic foods and products to Midcoast Maine for nearly 50 years. The Midcoast features a vibrant food culture, an extensive network of local farmers and producers, and a community of folks who care about what they eat, how it's sourced, and the benefits of supporting local suppliers. Rising Tide is fortunate to be a part of it and proud to be an important incubator and catalyst for our growing Maine food economy.

We carry products from approximately 300 Maine farmers and producers. You can find them featured within our Co-op walls, and we are proud to support these fine folks and the local food system. By hiring Maine people, utilizing Maine services, purchasing Maine products, and donating to Maine organizations, Rising Tide invested \$5,246,739 back into the Maine economy in 2024. That was more than fifty percent of our annual sales that year.

Access to healthy food for all is part of our mission, so we offer several ways to save including regular sales for everyone and savings through case and bulk discounts for our member-owners. We offer additional discounts for those who participate in state and federal nutrition programs. Rising Tide's Loving Local Meals program raises funds through our round-up program and private donations to purchase healthy, high-quality ingredients from local farmers and producers to feed our neighbors in need. The benefit is two-fold: supporting local farmers, while feeding local friends.

We're open seven days a week. We have the best produce displays in town. We carry fresh local and natural meats, local artisan cheeses and bread, a wide variety of bulk foods, grocery items, wine and craft beer, extensive wellness department, and unique gifts.

Our kitchen produces soups, sandwiches, and salads available to grab 'n' go as well as wholesome offerings on our hot bar. Baked goods are made daily, and everything is made with thoughtfully sourced ingredients.

Rising Tide has been "loving local" since its humble beginnings as a small buying club in 1978, to the community hub we are today with approximately 70 employees, more than 6100 active member-owners, and annual sales of over \$11 million.

Everyone is welcome!



About Our Host, Portland Food Co-op



The momentum for the Portland Food Co-op started in the spring of 2006, when a locally-owned natural foods store was bought and subsequently closed by a national whole foods chain. Community members organized and created a shared vision to open a cooperative grocery store in Portland. The energy for the Portland Food Co-op included four goals: supporting the local economy, building the local foods movement, creating a shared local business, and providing families with healthy, affordable food.

Over the next several years, a leadership team created by-laws, articles of incorporation, and a Member-Owner structure. In 2008, the Portland Food Co-op was officially incorporated as a cooperative business, and in 2010 kicked off its first Member-Owner drive.

The Co-op operated and grew as an all-volunteer buying club until the retail store could be opened. The Co-op's message was simply "Invest in us, Have access to local and bulk food now, and help build our storefront co-op in the future." By 2012, the buying club had over 300 Member-Owners and was realizing nearly \$200,000 per year in sales. In 2013, the leadership (now an official Board of Directors) made the brave move to open a retail store.

We began a Member-Owner drive and a fund-raising program to reach the 2,000 Member-Owners and the \$1.6 million needed to open a retail store. We secured a lease on our space at 290 Congress Street. Renovations on the space commenced in the summer of 2014, and both Member-Owners and the community at large watched in excitement as the long-awaited store finally took shape. After a soft opening in November of 2014, the Portland Food Co-op held a grand opening celebration on December 10, 2014.

The Co-op exceeded all expectations by achieving \$3.27 million in sales in 2015 with over 40% of that being for foods and other goods produced right here in the state of Maine.

Sales have since grown to over \$9.6 million and we now have over 8000 Member-Owners. We are so thankful to our "Portland and beyond" community which has shown us so much dedication and support.



About Our Sponsor – NCG the National Co+op Grocers

What is NCG?

National Co+op Grocers (NCG) is a business services cooperative representing 166 retail food co-ops (our members) with combined annual sales of \$2.8 billion and serving over 1.3 million consumer – owners. Our members operate 240 stores in 39 states across the



country. NCG helps co-ops realize many of the benefits of a chain while maintaining the autonomy of an independent community-owned grocer. We help unify co-ops to optimize operational and marketing resources, strengthen purchasing power, and, ultimately, offer more value to food co-op owners and shoppers. Our ability to deliver value derives from aggregating the purchasing power of NCG's members. The NCG system's success is a function of the interdependence between NCG and its members — each holding the other accountable to perform, while fully accepting responsibility for the growth and prosperity of the whole.



Development Co+operative®

About Our Sponsor

NCG Development Co+operative

What is the NCG Development Co+operative?

The NCG Development Cooperative (NCGDC) empowers startup food co-ops to launch thriving, community-owned grocery stores through hands-on guidance, strategic planning, and comprehensive development support. From refining business concepts and bylaws to partnering in site selection and store design, startups work closely with NCG's Startup Resource Manager to build strong foundations and prepare for NCG membership. With a focus on collaboration and long-term success, NCG is growing a resilient network of co-ops nationwide.





Indigenous Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that the land we are on today are the ancestral homelands of the Wabanaki Tribes, whose land is unceded and who were nearly exterminated by colonization.

The Wabanaki people have remained committed to the stewardship of this land over many centuries. It has been cherished and protected, as elders have instructed the young through generations. We are honored and grateful to be here today on their traditional lands.

We recognize that the long and painful history of oppression, colonization, displacement and erasure happened, and in order to address and change it, we must first speak and acknowledge it.

May this acknowledgment be more than words—may it be an invitation to reflect on our place in a shared history and our responsibilities in the present. May it call us into deeper learning, accountability, and relationship with the people of this land, past and present, and with the land itself.

We invite you to learn about more about the Wabanaki Tribes at (<https://wabanakialliance.com/>) and support nibezun (<https://www.nibezun.org/>), a tribally-guided nonprofit that celebrates culture as medicine, provides an inclusive space for healing, and promotes sustainability for all people and future generations.





On behalf of all of the cooperators here today, we made a donation to nibezun.

Honoring our Ancestors

We begin by pausing to remember and honor those who came before us.

We call in our ancestors—the ones of our families, of our cooperatives, of our communities, and of this land.

We honor their wisdom, their labor, their resilience, and the love that carried them forward so that we could be here today.

We especially lift up those who fought for civil rights in this country—who risked, resisted, and sacrificed so that freedom, dignity, and justice could be more fully realized.

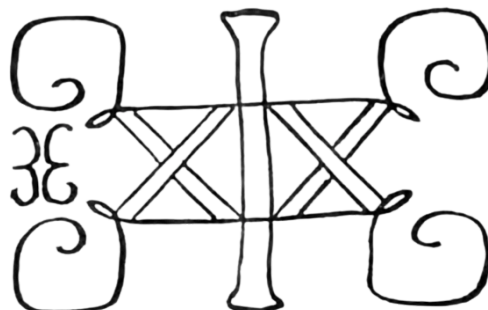
We also honor the leaders in the cooperative movement—visionaries who organized people and resources, who built businesses and communities rooted in shared ownership and mutual care. They showed us that cooperation is not only an economic strategy, but a pathway to freedom and self-determination.

May the strength of our ancestors inspire us.

May their struggles and their triumphs teach us.

May their dreams remind us that we are part of a larger story.

We thank them for walking before us, and we invite their presence to guide us as we gather, learn, build wisdom and strengthen our community together.





Gratitude for the Food

HUGE thanks to the great team of people pitching in to provide nourishment for this event!

Breakfast *(a truly cooperative effort)*

- Bagels, flavored cream cheese & gluten free scones
Good Tern Co-op / Hole in the Wall
- Frittata - Belfast Community Co-op
- Coffee - Rising Tide Co-op



RISING TIDE CO-OP

Lunch from Oga Suya - <https://ogasuyamaine.square.site>

- **Jollof Rice** - Nigeria jollof rice with tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, scotch bonnets & other spices (vegan, no gluten added)
- **Fried Rice** - authentic Nigeria flavor fried rice with mixed veggies - carrot, corn, green peas and lima beans
- **Chicken Lap Suya** (no gluten added)
- **Veggie Suya** - Zucchini, sweet pepper, red onion, cabbage marinated in suya powder (vegan, no gluten added)
- **Dodo** - Fried Plantains (vegan, no gluten added)
- (For vegan folks - Orange Ginger Tofu from Belfast Community Co-op)



Afternoon Sweet Treats - Good Tern Co-op



"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Community Agreements

Our aspiration, or collective vision, for how we want to be in relationship with one another, to help everyone in the group feel like they can contribute and be a part of courageous conversations.

- **Be Curious, Open, and Respectful** - call in, not out.
We're trying to throw sunshine, not shade.
- **No one knows everything - together we know a lot**
- **Confidentiality** - don't speak for others without explicit permission, don't share something communicated in a private or safe space.
- **One mic** - one voice at a time.
- **Take Space/Make Space** - if you are usually quiet, challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot, be mindful to leave room for quieter voices.
- **Expect unfinished business** - There are always more conversations to have and more work to do.
- **Take space and time** - to take care of yourself.
- **Notice when it's time to come back together as a full group**, wrapping up individual conversations so we can listen and participate collectively.
- Anything else?



Co-op Principles

Seven Principles guide cooperative businesses all over the world. Learn more at the [International Cooperative Association](https://www.ica.coop/) website.

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Democratic member control
3. Member economic participation
- 4. Autonomy and independence**
5. Education, training, and information
- 6. Cooperation among cooperatives**
7. Concern for community

A growing number of co-ops, including National Co+op Grocers, many individual grocery co-ops and US Credit Unions, have adopted the 8th Co-op Principle - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

The International Cooperative Alliance is currently undertaking a global consultation on possible changes to the Cooperative Principles, including a proposal to make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion an explicit eighth cooperative principle.

This year's theme, Stronger Together: Balancing Autonomy and Collective Power, inspires us to delve into principles 4 and 6, and consider how these principles can both challenge and strengthen our co-ops.



Principle 4: Autonomy and Independence

“Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.” – International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) (www.ica.coop, *Cooperative identity, Values & Principles, 2025*).

Until the 1990s, this principle was implied rather than explicitly stated as a core aspect of the cooperative identity. Not surprisingly, it has been understood or interpreted in a variety of ways.

The ICA’s guidance acknowledges the necessity for businesses to enter into agreements with other entities, but warns co-ops to preserve democratic control when establishing agreements with government, providers of financing, and other organizations.

Principle 6: Cooperation Among Cooperatives

“Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures” – International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) (www.ica.coop, *Cooperative identity, Values & Principles, 2025*).

The guidance notes for this principle go on to say that the 6th Principle is both a show of solidarity and an active way to develop the overall co-op movement: “by working together, co- operatives gain the expertise, scale, and support necessary to heighten awareness, sustainability, and impact, especially where fixed costs and resources can be shared.” (www.ica.coop, *Guidance Notes to the Cooperative Principles, 2025*).

The ICA sees federations of cooperatives (like NCG) as being both directly beneficial to co-ops (helping to represent and advance co-op needs) and as a useful structure for cooperating with other co-ops.

Tension between Cooperative Principles

Whether Principle 4 and Principle 6 complement one another or conflict with each other is often left to individual interpretation. Many cooperators have struggled with the tension that exists between the two principles, and because both co-ops and the markets in which they operate change and evolve over time, how co-op stakeholders understand and embody these principles also evolves. As a result, co-op stakeholders periodically return to this topic to try to build alignment around a shared interpretation.



Presenters

Dave Olson

Dave Olson is the Chief Membership Officer at NCG and leads NCG's new Strategic Development team. The Strategic Development team collaborates with General Managers (GMs) and other senior leaders at co-ops to help them maximize the benefits of their membership with NCG and its programs and services. The team also provides leaders with coaching and guidance and vetted resources to assist with core leadership functions like strategic planning, market positioning, organizational development, and change management. Before coming to NCG, Dave worked at New Pioneer Co-op in Iowa City, IA and then Mississippi Market in Saint Paul, MN, where he resides today.



Jonah Fertig-Burd

Jonah Fertig-Burd is a consultant, facilitator, coach, farmer, cook, and artist. He owns InterRooted, where he provides consulting, facilitation, and coaching to leaders, cooperatives, organizations, and collaboratives working on food systems and farming, community spaces, and with immigrant communities and collaborative systems change initiatives. He is a farmer and co-owner of Celebration Tree Farm & Wellness Center a multi-stakeholder cooperative in Durham, Maine, growing organic Christmas trees and offering wellness services, cultural programs, retreats, workshops and events.



He is a peer advisor with the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, providing support to worker co-ops. From 2020-23, he was a Community Partner for Food Systems at the Sewall Foundation. From 2014-2020, he was the Director of Cooperative Food Systems at the Cooperative Development Institute, working with farmers, fishers, cooks and food producers to form cooperatives. In 2007, he co-founded Local Sprouts Cooperative, a worker-owned cafe and catering business in Portland. He's currently on the Vice President of the Board of the Cooperative Fund of the North East, co-chair of the Board of Maine Inside Out, a board member of Land in Common Community Land Trust and co-chair of the Durham (Maine) Agriculture Committee. He loves to cook, make art, play music and walk in the woods. He lives in Durham, Maine, with his wife and family.



Khadija El Barkaoui, PhD

Khadija El Barkaoui, PhD (Tilila), leads Coelle Travel and its Travel with Purpose and Vacationland With Purpose initiatives, creating community-based experiences that connect people through cultural food, traditional ceremonies, and meaningful engagement. She partners with women-led cooperatives, local artisans, rural communities, and environmental initiatives to design experiences that honor Indigenous culture, preserve traditions, promote sustainability, and give back directly to the communities that host them.



Her work immerses visitors in rituals, tea ceremonies, storytelling, and hands-on cultural practices. This offers insight into the values and traditions of the communities she partners with while supporting environmental stewardship. In addition to Coelle Travel, Khadija consults on community engagement and sustainable business practices, offering solutions that celebrate heritage, promote sustainability, and harness the transformative power of authentic connection.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM WOMEN COOPERATIVES INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

WE GIVE BACK

COELLE
Travel with Purpose

We connect people through authentic and community-based experiences that honor indigenous cultures and support women in tourism.

TRAVEL WITH PURPOSE

@coelletravel
contact@coelletravel.com
khadija@coelletravel.com
www.coelletravel.com



Small Group Conversation Guide

Round 1 – Solidarity vs Autonomy

Every co-op and organization navigates the tension between moving together and moving independently. Where does that balance feel right for yours — and where does it feel off?

- How does your co-op/organization balance solidarity and autonomy? Where does it feel harmonious, and where does tension show up?
- What connects your co-op/organization to its community?
- What parts of your co-op or organization's identity feel most important to carry forward?

Round 2 – Story Time

Think of a time your co-op or organization tried to collaborate with another group — something that worked, or something that didn't quite land.

- What made that collaboration flow?
What elements made it feel easy or natural?
- What made it difficult?
What got in the way or slowed things down?
- What would you do differently to set collaboration up for success?

Round 3 – Reflection

- What was interesting from your conversation? What surprised you? What excites you? What do you want to learn more about?
- What are you taking away? What will you share with your community / home co-op?



Resources

Autonomy and Independence: What's Up with Principle Four?

By Ben Sandel | December 28, 2017

[\(https://columinate.coop/autonomy-and-independence-whats-up-with-principle-four/\)](https://columinate.coop/autonomy-and-independence-whats-up-with-principle-four/)

International Cooperative Alliance

Cooperative Principles Guidance Notes

<https://ica.coop/en/media/library/research-and-reviews/guidance-notes-cooperative-principles>

National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA) Principle 6 Initiative

<https://ncbaclusa.coop/p6/>

BIG thanks to NCG for sponsoring the Co-op Cafes!





Your Facilitators

Desiree Nicole Lester



After years of working across arts and nonprofit institutions, Desiree Nicole Lester began questioning whether “business as usual” was the only option. In Oct 2022, she joined the inaugural Co-op Navigator Fellowship with the Cooperative Fund of the Northeast, deepening her commitment to cooperative models rooted in shared ownership and collective responsibility.

She is the Founder of The Artist Assignment LLC, where she is exploring documentation and legacy services for artists through a cooperative, community-centered lens.

Learn more about my work at [The Artist Assignment](#)

Hether Jonna



Hether Jonna is a seasoned facilitator, planner, and passionate co-op enthusiast who believes in the transformative power of people coming together around the cooperative principles and values. A member of Columinate, a shared services cooperative, Hether supports mission-driven organizations— co-ops, nonprofits, and social enterprises—through governance training, leadership development, board orientation, retreat facilitation, and equity work. She has been helping to shape conversations with cooperators all over the country as a member of Columinate’s Co-op Cafe planning team for the past 5 years.

What energizes Hether most is creating welcoming spaces where real conversations happen, ideas flow, and learning is mutual. She believes the best solutions come not from a single voice, but from the collective wisdom in the room. Her approach invites curiosity, honors lived experience, and helps people build the trust needed to connect, reflect, inspire and learn from one another to spark positive change at their co-ops and in their communities.

Hether Jonna - hetherjonna@columinate.coop



Notes & Doodles



Notes & Doodles



Co-op Cafe Feedback

Thanks for joining us today! We'd love to hear your thoughts.

Please rate each section below with 1 being not useful and 5 as very useful

Dave Olson, NCG

1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Jonah Fetig-Burd

1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Khadija El Barkaoui - tea ceremony

1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Small Group Discussions - Autonomy & Collective Power

1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Continuums of Perspective

1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Open Space / World Cafe

1 2 3 4 5

Comments



Overall

Would you recommend this Co-op Cafe to others? *1 = no way, 5 = definitely*

1 2 3 4 5

What did you like? What went well?

What would you do differently?

What topics would you like to discuss at future Co-op Cafes?

Thoughts on the venue and food?

General comments / other