

# Solidarity Co-op Summit

## What is this all about?

Co-operative Business Consultants (CBC – [www.cbc.coop](http://www.cbc.coop)) have been organising the Ways Forward conference series for the past four years. The conferences have proved to be very successful in bringing people together to explore shaping a ‘People’s Economy’ that benefits everyone. During this time, the political landscape has also changed dramatically, in particular with the emergence of a new Labour Party leadership which openly supports such ideas.

The Solidarity Economy Association (SEA – [www.solidarityeconomy.coop](http://www.solidarityeconomy.coop)) has been an active supporter of Ways Forward conferences (in its previous form as the Institute for Solidarity Economics). It is actively working with a range of partners and organisations to support the growth of a solidarity economy within the UK. Whilst UK-based, SEA undertakes some work internationally, and is one of only two UK-based members of RIPESS Europe ([www.ripest.eu](http://www.ripest.eu)) – the European arm of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy.

We are pleased to announce that CBC and the SEA are collaborating on this Solidarity Co-op Summit.

## What is a co-op for?

The idea of what a co-op *is*, and what it is *for*, we feel, is becoming confused due, in part, to the fact that the high-profile Co-operative Bank is not, in fact, a co-operative in any sense. We have also seen many large co-ops suffer ‘management capture’, for example with the Co-operative Group no longer formally being controlled by its members. It’s becoming increasingly unclear which co-operatives are really co-operatives adhering to the ICA values and principles.

We think it is important to refocus on the original co-op ideal, that co-ops are self help businesses, democratically owned and controlled by their members, and promoting social justice. Across the world, this type of economic activity is part of what is becoming known as solidarity economics. So we think it’s helpful to describe such co-ops, as solidarity co-ops.

## What is a solidarity co-op?

We don’t yet have a fixed definition of a solidarity co-op. We want to collaborate to reach a clearer understanding of what this might mean with other co-operators, both in this country and internationally.

Our loose working definition so far is ‘a co-operative that demonstrates in action its adherence to all seven of the International Co-operative Alliance principles – both in how it operates internally and in its support for others working for social and environmental justice.’

However, we recognise that this is a journey, and that many organisations demonstrate some co-op principles and aspire to others. We want to encourage support for co-ops who would like to build on their commitments to all 7 principles.

### **Effective vehicles**

It's clear there is a growing need for more effective mechanisms in the UK co-operative movement to take forward new ideas, particularly the types of ideas being developed at the Ways Forward conferences.

We believe it's now time to take Ways Forward activity to the next level. We want to see if there is an appetite for finding or creating networks to allow for the focus and energy of participants to be sustained throughout the year, and to catalyse larger projects. We would like to facilitate a discussion with other 'solidarity' co-operatives about how this could happen.

### **Who is invited to this Solidarity Co-op Summit?**

Our aim is to include as many co-operators as possible. However, this first summit is to test the water and clarify these ideas with a smaller group. We hope that one of the outcomes of this summit will be a wider event, discussing these ideas with more people.

We believe that your organisation would make a vital contribution to these ideas. It's for this reason that we'd like to invite you to join us for a solidarity co-op summit.

### **Summit Agenda**

The event aims to:

- Move towards a common understanding of what is meant by solidarity co-ops
- Discuss our common challenges and how we might meet our shared goals
- Reach an agreement in principle to work towards creating a network for solidarity co-ops
- Identify collaborators who would help in organising a Ways Forward 6 conference around this theme

Please find the draft summit agenda below.

## Solidarity Co-op Summit ~ Draft Agenda

Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ  
5<sup>th</sup> October, Manchester

Time	Session	Format
10:00	Registration, refreshments	
10:30	Welcome and introductions. Purpose of this event	Facilitated by Martin Meteyard
10:45	What is a solidarity co-op? including international and local examples, working definitions, testing, mapping	Broad discussion of perspectives and issues
11:45	Break and refreshments	
12:00	Our shared challenges, needs and goals.	Facilitated by Jo Bird
1:00	Lunch	
1:45	Larger projects and their vehicles: How to meet our shared needs including appetite for a Solidarity Co-op Network, Ways Forward 6 conference	Facilitated by Bob Cannell
3:00	Break and refreshments	
3:15	Signing of a Declaration/agreement in principle. Who would do what next? Other announcements/news/adverts	Facilitated by Colm Massey  Go round
4:00	Close	
6:00	Optional evening meal out	Restaurant (not covered by ticket price)