



**Black and Brown**  
WORKERS COLLECTIVE

## **Black and Brown Workers Testimony**

### **If you work in a co-op or are starting one: Share Your Story •**

#### **What led you to want to start or join a cooperative business? •**

In order to understand why the Black and Brown Workers Collective has chosen to move towards a cooperative model, it is first necessary to understand how and why we formed. In February of 2016 our collective began to form as a result of the racist, classist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, and sexist policies and practices that have existed and still exist within the Philadelphia HIV/AIDS non-profit organizational structure in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These practices were and are disproportionately and adversely impacting Black and Brown workers as these nonprofits are majority owned and ran by folks who do not reflect our communities. We noticed that while black and brown specific grants were being written and received by these organizations at millions of dollars apiece (ie. Black and Latino specific grants), management is still overwhelmingly white. We seek to problematize this infrastructure as front line black and brown workers who speak out about the oppressive practices are getting targeted and pushed out of the work. We began to archive the experiences of Black and Brown workers through 1 on 1 interviews captured in our Call to Action (see. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B39RP\\_uwuW60Ukx2am9rWXM3YWc/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B39RP_uwuW60Ukx2am9rWXM3YWc/view)). We also want to lift up the reasons why many workers are forced to swallow their voices in the name of organizations that are profiting off of their communities. We know that many front line workers are not just racially marginalized but are also marginalized along lines of gender identity & gender identity expression, sexual identity, and are HIV positive. Many of these workers are living on or below the poverty line. This makes it difficult to challenge a power structure that many are dependent on for survival. As a result of this BBWC acts as a critical mass that can bring the concerns of workers to the table without jeopardizing that worker's confidentiality.

#### **Describe your cooperative business. •**

We are in the very preliminary phases of moving towards a cooperative model. We vision providing anti-oppression and political engagement education to the community at large. A similar coop that exists through this model is AORTA (see. <http://aorta.coop/>).

#### **What led you to invest in the Philadelphia region?**

Philadelphia is where we began to organize as Black and Brown workers who were and are experiencing racial discrimination in our work places. This is home to our base and work. We will continue to utilize Philly as our home base.

#### **Describe your organizational culture. How have you contributed to the broader community?**

Our collective culture is one rooted in anti-oppression pro liberation organizing tools and strategies. This means that our base and core group reflects the constituency we fight beside,

with and for. As a worker's right's collective every direct action is led and planned by the workers most impacted on the ground. We also utilize intersectional praxis which means that we are always strategizing from the reality that people are multi dimensional. Many of our members are not just marginalized along lines of race, but also along lines of sexual identity, gender identity, class, ability, nationality and HIV status.

The Black and Brown Workers Collective (BBWC) has impacted the community on every level possible. First, we have impacted workers on the ground by engaging them in base building and organizing. Workers have expressed feeling a greater sense of political efficacy. We have impacted organizational structures as we have successfully organized to remove directors who were abusing workers. We have impacted the climate of racism in the gayborhood as we are the only group who has and continues to engage in direct action in regards to racist policies and practices. We engage everyone from front line workers to Mayor Kenney around demanding change and legislation that reflects progressive change. You can visit us on facebook (**Black and Brown Workers Collective**) and our website ([www.bbwcphilly.org](http://www.bbwcphilly.org)) to view the media coverage of our work.

**What impact have you had beyond meeting your financial bottom-line?**

All of our current work is off the sweat of our backs and through fund raising through the community. We received one emergency grant for \$500 4 months ago from Resist. Other than this, everything currently is being done without compensation. A financial bottom-line will always come second to the work of Liberation for our collective.

**This can look like environmental and sustainability impact, contributions to social and racial justice, or creation of high-quality jobs, etc.)**

Our greatest contribution is to social and racial justice.

**What positive impacts will increased resources to support co-ops have in Philadelphia?**

Increased resources to support co-ops will literally increase the chance and quality of life for Black and Brown people. Amidst the reality that a black body hits the ground every 28 hours and increased poverty levels, racially marginalized people are living with increased psychological and physical violence. Co-ops enables us to create a work environment where there is increased equity, fairness, justice as central to the work, and quality of life.

For many racially marginalized folks, working for a co-op will increase their ability to feel more creative simply because their emotional safety has increased.

**Why is this important to do now?**

See the Black Lives Matter Movement.

**Describe how supportive legislation will advance the cooperative movement.**

Supportive legislation will increase the ability to obtain funding specifically for co-ops in Philadelphia.

**How would City support for cooperatives effect you and your work?**

It would completely transform the quality of life for folks who are a part of the BBWC. Many of our workers are living below the poverty line. Some have returned to survival sex work because they cannot stomach the climate in their non-profit work spaces. Some of our folks are living with HIV and it is necessary for them to have access to a liveable wage and health care.