



## Minnesota Indian Business Alliance

Small Business  
Column

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### Cooperative Models: A Just and Equitable Path To Retaining and Building Community Wealth



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Cooperative Development Services (CDS) is pleased to be a MN Indian Business Alliance partner, and are particularly pleased to be an online contributor to MNIBA's first series of online articles. Over the coming months, CDS will contribute information about how the cooperative business model can assist tribes, tribal communities and tribal citizens develop new businesses in ways that are consistent with traditional values and understandings about resource use and ownership.

#### CDS Overview

Perhaps a brief word about CDS would be in order first. CDS is a 24 year old non-profit organization headquartered in Madison WI, with a program office in St. Paul MN. Our work focuses on helping new co-ops get started, and helping existing cooperatives grow and expand.

CDS works in three primary areas:

- Value-added agriculture and forestry
- Renewable energy/energy efficiency
- Community development

Our primary skill sets include an understanding of the cooperative model; the ability to guide organiza-

tional development efforts; the ability to conduct solid feasibility analysis and business planning for enterprises in our core sectors; and the ability to help our clients access resources and information to advance their business interests.

About three years ago, CDS began a process to identify where our cooperative development knowledge might be well used to help communities meet their business needs, while retaining and building their wealth in just and equitable ways. As a result of that initial work, we were fortunate to begin networking within the emerging Minnesota Indian business development community, and that's how we got connected to MNIBA.

#### Cooperative Overview

So what's a cooperative? A good short working definition is that a cooperative or "co-op" is a business that is owned and controlled by the people who use its services. So a housing co-op is owned and controlled by its residents; a food co-op is owned and controlled by the people who shop there; a credit union is owned and controlled by those



who use its financial services; and a rural electric co-op is owned and controlled by those who buy their power from the co-op.

*Kevin Edberg is the Executive Director of Cooperative Development Services and works out of the St. Paul, MN office.*

Each of these represents some slightly variations on cooperative ownership, and over the course of the coming year, we hope to share some ideas and resources that might show how Minnesota Indian communities might make use of the models to meet their own unique needs. So keep checking back here for new information and articles.