

**Candidate Name:** Alex Green

**Nominated By:** Inter Cooperative Council (Ann Arbor, MI)

**Personal Statement**

Dear NASCO Members,

My name is Alex Green, and I am the current NASCO President in the final year of his board term. My cooperative experience is extensive, local, and national. I lived at ICC Ann Arbor for four years – serving as Finance VP and board President – subsequently working as their Finance Director. My three-years on the NASCO board included appointments to the NASCO Properties and NASCO Development Services boards. Outside of NASCO, I work for Human Rights Watch in NYC and am a CPA.

Cooperative involvement has brought me to dozens of member organizations of every shape, size, and type, connecting me to many dedicated movement builders. These people and experiences inform my vision for how the NASCO Family can meet movement needs as an educator, connector, cultural disruptor, cooperative developer, and advocate. My two years of work towards the new NASCO strategic plan is now bearing fruit, but our focus now shifts to implementing our ambitious initiatives and better equipping our board to lead and support staff in pursuing these plans. My professional, cooperative, and NASCO experience makes me well suited to contribute to that work, and I hope you will agree by again voting me onto the NASCO board.

**Why are you involved in coops?**

I was fascinated when I first heard of co-ops by the idea of self-governing individuals living and sharing together to save money and create a community culture. My involvement with them has been a transformative experience of personal empowerment, organizational accomplishment, and interpersonal rewards. My work towards the preservation, fortification, and proliferation of cooperatives comes from the hope that bringing the cooperative experience to others can create a more equitable and compassionate society.

**What is your vision for NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?**

NASCO provides many unique movement building services to its members: member and staff education, property management and development, emergency assistance, and networking. Moving forward, I foresee a successful NASCO improving those offerings while adding new capabilities to meet member and movement needs.

On current offerings, I hope to help NASCO develop both leadership (e.g., house, executive) and anti-oppression training retreats, expand staff to provide members with better access to our team, and pursue cooperative development as an anti-gentrification tool. Two areas that I want to see NASCO move into are in response to member interests and needs: 1) pursue advocacy on the

local, state, and federal levels to create more opportunities for our members, and 2) develop a robust fundraising capacity to keep member financial contributions to a growing NASCO at a reasonable level.

**Of the items listed in the *Requirements of NASCO Directors*, in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?**

My financial skills are an important strength. Business, finance, and accounting experience and certifications are rare in the cooperative world, so my background fills a common skills gap. My experience with many different cooperatives is another asset; knowledge of cooperatives of all different sizes, structures, and types enables me to better consider the diverse circumstances of our membership. Finally, my NASCO tenure means that I bring institutional knowledge of NASCO's story, policy, and structure in order to be a stabilizing force on the board.

**How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?**

I have had no trouble being a high contributor to the NASCO board over the past three years despite full employment and other responsibilities. I am careful to plan my schedule far in advance and diligent about my commitments. This enables me to participate fully in all dimensions of being on the NASCO board: in-person and telephone meetings, as well as email work and discussions.

**Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?**

My two biggest focuses with NASCO would be providing reliable leadership and the implementation of NASCO's new strategic plan. The board has had high turnover since a period of instability five years ago, so we have lacked institutional knowledge and mentorship ability. As a senior member, I want to lead orienting, advising, and supporting new board members so all board members can succeed in guiding NASCO. Similarly, our strategic plan is as much a summation of initiatives as it is a group of stories about how those goals were formed and the approaches we hoped to take for achieving them. I want to help retell those stories as well as oversee their implementations to preserve the initial visions (which were based on substantial member and board input).

Additionally, I want to help the board continue its focus on accessibility and inclusion. We have been fortunate that outspoken board and community members have shone a spotlight on structural issues that may limit some peoples' abilities to feel and be fully involved and welcomed on the NASCO board. Although we've begun to address these items, we need board members with experience and context to continue the proactive work. Otherwise we risk getting trapped in a spiral of continuing to only acknowledge the issues without results.

**Candidate Name:** Topaz Hooper

**Nominated By:** St Peace House (St. Petersburg, FL)

**Part I: Personal Data & Statement**

Topaz Hooper is an alum of the Boulder Housing Coalition and currently resides in NASCO's first Florida cooperative, the St. Peace House. Topaz has served on the NASCO Board from 2014-16 as both the President and Vice President of the Board. She has worked diligently to improve the organization's inclusivity efforts. She has chaired the Inclusion Committee and served as the Person of Color Caucus Chair. She has written the Plan for Inclusion 2016 and has curated the *Safe(r) Spaces Guidelines*; which seeks to create a safer board atmosphere for NASCO board members with marginalized identities. Professionally, she works at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL as the Assistant Coordinator for Multicultural Affairs. Topaz would like to continue to serve on the NASCO Board and support the organization's inclusivity efforts as well as expand the cooperative movement into the Southern U.S.

**Part II: Questions**

**1. Why are you involved in co-ops?**

- a. I grew up in cooperatives. My mother lived in one of the only Catholic Worker Houses in the U.S., the one based in Denver. She was a homeless mother at the time and really needed community to support her growth as a person. I grew up with long tables of different people sharing stories, eating the same food, and laughing together. I didn't know I was in a cooperative style of living until I moved to Boulder, CO where I helped "illegal" cooperatives fight for their right to exist in an expensive college town. I am proud to say co-ops are the future for economic justice and those who need community to survive.

**2. What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?**

- a. I envision NASCO has an all-inclusive organization that supports co-ops of all mediums. Currently, NASCO is deeply rooted in student housing cooperatives with sprinkles of worker and food cooperatives. I would like to see NASCO expand deeper into the cooperative movement and support more co-ops whose student population may be a minority. If NASCO can broaden, its reach can be more impactful. In the long term, the organization should seek more cooperatives and continue to be inclusive of student and non-student cooperatives.

**3. Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?**

- a. I see myself contributing to NASCO's anti-oppression and inclusivity programming. I have worked in academia in multicultural and anti-oppression spaces. I've built successful student focused programming designed to bring people together and move forward as a strong community. NASCO has committed to working on anti-oppression and inclusivity efforts in its 2016 family strategic plan and I know I have the skills, knowledge, insight, planning, and coordination to help NASCO reach its goals.

4. **How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?**
  - a. Since serving on the NASCO board, I've contributed on average 5 hours per week to NASCO related tasks. My job, as the Assistant Coordinator for Multicultural Affairs at Eckerd College allows me to expand my knowledge base and bring successful programs and initiatives to NASCO. Both NASCO and my job are based in empowering students to take agency and grow. The skills I've learned from NASCO and my work overlap and mutually reinforce each other.
5. **Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?**
  - a. On top of Inclusion efforts, I would like to see NASCO expand more into the South. The Southern part of the U.S. has plenty of co-ops but not a lot of institutional support or ways to network with successful existing co-ops around the country. My new housing co-op, the St. Peace House, is so grateful for the opportunity to meet with northern and Canadian co-ops who have been successful. I would like to offer NASCO's services and networks to more student co-ops in states like Florida and others in the South.

**Candidate Name:** Tristan Laing

**Nominated by:** Syd Burke, Alex Green, Maya Menlo, Meg Seidel, and Lana Wong

**Part I: Personal Data & Statement**

As a long time board member and current president of Campus Co-operative Residences in Toronto, Canada, as well as the current president of the Ontario Student Co-op Association, I bring many years of student co-operative experience to the NASCO Board of Directors. I have also been involved with food co-ops on two university campuses in Toronto. This last year was my first time sitting on the NASCO board, and I am very thankful to have had the chance to do so. I am running for the NASCO board again primarily because I want to bring the Ontario Student Housing Co-ops back into NASCO, but this is a complex task and it wasn't possible for it to be accomplished in a single year

**Part II: Questions**

1) Because Co-ops are real world, on the ground opportunity for us to be involved in non-capitalist enterprise. The challenges we experience in the co-op movement are the inherent and socially constructed challenges of managing capital with accountability to communities rather than shareholders. We need solutions to these challenges not only to advance the Co-op model, but more broadly for us to stand any chance at creating an alternative to either some variant of shareholder capitalist, or Soviet style state-driven socialism. In other words, if we can't solve the problem of accountability through building democracy, it will be solved for us with the implementation of tyranny. Co-ops are businesses that operate in the market, but their existence subverts the market by operating democratically and according to values, rather than tyrannically and according to profit. The more we grow our Co-operative movement, the more we embed our economic activity in our human values. Rather than waiting for salvation by a revolution which never seems to arrive, I would rather work today to build an economy which rejects the capitalist urge towards indefinite growth and exploitation.

2) NASCO's strength is member education and fostering strong youth and student leadership in student and campus based co-ops. By attending institute, the members of our members are exposed to a world of co-operative realities beyond their home Co-op. These experiences make a difference in how our members' members will perceive democratic organizing for the rest of their lives, and may even impact their choice of career. The experience of attending Institute is so heartening because our broad spectrum of programming engages our delegates holistically - not only as representatives of their home co-ops, but through a also as students, workers, and as citizens. Success over the long term would mean NASCO succeeds in bringing this broad approach to co-operativism to all the members of our members.

3) I can aid NASCO most by ensuring that we remain accountable to our membership by increasing opportunities for member participation, and by creating links between the NASCO board of directors and the elected representatives of our active members. The distance between NASCO and the Ontario student co-ops, the departure of BSC, as well as this year's non-NASCO co-op staff conference in Berkeley, are all signs that NASCO needs to increase its accountability to its membership, and especially in the case of larger co-operatives where staff play a greater role in institutional memory, NASCO needs to have improved communications channels with its members that include communication between the NASCO board and the elected leadership of our members.

4) The most important contribution I've made over the last year outside of board meetings has been chairing the Member Engagement Committee. I'm proud to say that our committee brought forward plans for a participatory General Members Meeting, as well as a Google Docs survey to improve reporting. The Membership Engagement Committee hopes to continue this work based on discussions we will have during the General Meeting at Institute, and create an ongoing cycle of member consultation to keep NASCO accountable to its membership.

5) My priorities as a NASCO Board member are: 1) Ensure that NASCO remain relevant to our larger members, 2) confront the contradictions between member leadership and the increasing role of staff in crafting organizational vision at Co-ops with large staffs, and 3) bring the Ontario student housing Co-ops back into the fold.

**Candidate Name:** Jessica Sietsema

**Nominated by:** MSU Student Housing Cooperative (East Lansing, MI)

1. A three year alumnus of the Student Housing Cooperative in East Lansing, MI, I served for one year on the Board of Directors as Corporate Secretary and another on the Executive Committee as Vice President of Education. I am presently a member and Treasurer of Rivendell, an independent coop in Lansing dating back to 1971. I attended NASCO Institute in 2014 and Staff & Managers Conference in May 2015. After taking a few years off for personal reasons, I will finish a BA Philosophy and BS Computer Science in 2018 at Michigan State University. I volunteer with the Michigan State University Sexual Assault Program and helped spearhead dialogue in our system on building consent culture and safety for survivors of sexual assault.

I am running for the NASCO Board of Directors because I would like to continue to serve the cooperative movement, to network and work with cooperatives outside of Michigan, and to continue to build my skill set. Cooperatives are to me one of the only extant alternatives to capitalism, and in these precarious times give me hope for a more sustainable, democratic future.

2. Quite simply, I am invested in the cooperative movement because it saved my life. As a queer, trans woman raised in a conservative Christian school/community, I suffered from a lack of recognition or socialization in my life prior to college. The cooperative housing I found at Michigan State provided my first true home and helped me begin to love myself in a way that wasn't possible before. This is a gift that I cannot help but share, and I think that cooperatives can be especially valuable for minority students and survivors of trauma.

NASCO is the confederal body by which the next generation of cooperative leadership is trained and grown, and an organization that supports local cooperatives. In order to flourish, NASCO must continue to recognize the varieties of organization that it serves, across borders and regions. It is simultaneously a property management company, and the access that NASCO and its constituent organizations have to capital is breathtaking.

Of the requirements for directors, I can best aid the organization as a steward and representative. I have several years experience as a steward for the Student Housing Cooperative, having walked the organization out of a relatively dark period, hiring several new, enthusiastic staff members, and shifting towards a policy governance model. I can also provide specific feedback for the ways in which NASCO can better help accommodate LGBT students and survivors of sexual assault.

Over the next three years I will be working as a rideshare driver and finishing an undergraduate degree. I am comfortable with the flexibility that both responsibilities entail, and will enjoy being able to contribute to NASCO. Outside of board meetings, I would like to build on my three years experience in the MSU Libraries and build archives documenting the rich history of our continent's cooperatives, and expand the Shared Resources Library.

As a board member, I would like specifically to build awareness of supporting survivors of violence, whether it is of sexual assault that all too sadly plagues our college campuses, of the painful childhoods of LGBT youth, and the ways in which the organization can begin to address racial and colonial violence. Further, the way labor functions in a cooperative when many members are mentally ill and most of us are overworked and indebted is also an issue that needs to be better addressed.

**Candidate Name:** Lana Wong

**Nominated By:** Whitehall Cooperative (Austin, TX)

**Part I: Personal Data & Statement**

My involvement with co-ops started when I lived at Waterloo Co-operative Residence Inc (WCRI) while studying Math/Financial Analyst & Risk Management at the University of Waterloo. Since 2011, I had been serving on the WCRI Board, and I have played an active role in all aspects of governance, including strategic planning, policy development, monitoring, succession planning, and hiring of Executive Director. While serving on the board for 5+ years, I have trained and mentored over 30+ new board members. Through WCRI, I linked with other student housing co-ops, local co-ops, and sector co-op organizations at regional, provincial, and national level. Currently, I also serve on the OSCA (Ontario Student Co-op Association) board.

At professional capacity, I have worked as an intercompany accountant and am currently a financial analyst at the energy management company where I worked since 2013. I was involved with monthly closing, reconciliation, and reporting processes. I am working on simplifying and standardizing reporting using data visualization and analytics tools, with other financial analysts in North America.

In the past few years, through the support of NASCO board, staff, and friends, we have re-built operational capacity. Last year the NASCO Family got together to identify a plan for the future. Next steps include approval of the plan, I believe that my knowledge about NASCO, connection with Canadian student co-ops, and strength in governance and finance will be an asset on the board, and it is the reason I am running for the board.

**Part II: Questions**

1) Why are you involved in co-ops?

I came across the co-op model by chance while searching for off campus housing, and the people in co-ops and the missions of different co-ops drawn me to learn more. I appreciate the cooperative values, and the way they guide the decision making and actions of co-ops. These values and principles lead co-ops to pay attention to not just profit, but also people and planet. Co-ops are able to address changing members' needs quicker, pay more considerations to the communities they belong to, and realize greater value creation in the long run. The co-operative business model has the greatest potential to drive innovation in the markets and shape equitable societies.

2) What is your vision of NASCO within the cooperative movement? What is important for NASCO's long-term success in cooperative education?



I see NASCO continue to play a role in co-op education and anti-oppression training. Furthermore, I see NASCO taking a more active role in connecting co-ops together and facilitating collaboration between co-ops and between co-ops. Due to its unique membership base and reach, I also see NASCO playing a major role in driving research and development in the sector, especially in group equity housing co-ops.

For long-term success in co-operative education, I think it is important to be familiar with the needs of our members, especially as a membership organization. We need to be proactive in identifying challenges that are commonly faced by our member co-ops, and doing research and seeking solutions to counter the challenges. We should also be prepared to provide support to member co-ops should they have urgent or critical needs. For long-term success, not in co-operative education, I think that NASCO has a few organization structural and high level directional topics that we need to think about. These topics include relationship with NASCO Family, governance-management structure, and geographical focus.

3) Of the items listed in the Requirements of NASCO Directors (in the board member job description), in what areas do you think you can best aid NASCO in its mission? What skills will you bring to the board?

I have knowledge in board governance, strategic planning, finance, and planning of events. Adding to my institutional knowledge, I think I can best aid NASCO in designing sustainable structures and processes. On the board, I will be analytical and prudent in making organizational decisions. As one of the few Canadians on the board, I also hope to contribute in making connection between NASCO and Canadian co-ops or co-ops in Canada.

4) How are you able to contribute to the organization outside Board meetings? How will your other commitments allow you to give time and energy to the Board over the next three years?

I was nominated for the NASCO board election in 2012, 2014, and 2015, and was elected one 2-year term and two 1-year terms. During my terms on the NASCO board, I mostly contribute in committee work. I have been consistently doing so in the last 3.5 years while I served on Exec Committee as the Treasurer and Secretary, Member Engagement Committee, Financial Sustainability Committee, Planning Committee, Hiring Committee, and Negotiations Committee. I took part in major discussion, including policy and bylaw revision, elections structure, dues structure, staff collective contract, strategic plan, and budget approval. I would also want to participate in local (Canada) co-op network for NASCO, once we know how we want to proceed.

I currently work full time, and the rest of my time is spent with the co-operative movement. Should any of my commitments change, I will still continue to place NASCO and co-op movement on a high priority.

5) Are there specific issues you would like to work on as a board member?



## 2017 Board Candidate Statements

Streamline NASCO governance processes, improve membership (as “owners”) engagement, improve NASCO presence and relationship with Canadian co-ops.