

About Prospera's Explore Your Cooperative Program (Explora)

See more details for new online version below

What is it?

The Explore Your Cooperative program (Explora) is a training for Latina entrepreneurs with an interest in exploring the basics of cooperativism in order to launch their own businesses or join an existing cooperative. The program consists of ten 3-hour sessions in which the essential topics covered include an introduction to cooperatives and how they operate, tools for effective communication and governance, conflict transformation, and—with the partnership of [Centro Community Partners](#) — participants also develop a first draft of a business plan. Since its inception in 2016, 190 participants have graduated from the program. We are expecting another 26 to graduate from the online program that culminates in June this year.

Prospera sees launching a business as a vehicle for Latina entrepreneurs to develop their leadership skills, reconnect with their internal capacity, and cultivate collective power. Explora's comprehensive approach uses popular education and coaching methodologies to honor participants' stories of migration, struggle, and growth through participatory and interactive learning processes.

At the conclusion of the 10 sessions of Explora, participants will have acquired the basic tools necessary to continue on the path of entrepreneurship. With the accompaniment of Prospera and other partner organizations for technical advice, coaching, and continued programming, participants are well-equipped to pursue the next phase of their respective business plans. In some cases, participants enter the program with an already established business that they wish to convert into a cooperative. In other cases they are looking for support to launch or adapt a new business. Most importantly, they discover a rich community that will stand with and behind them as they take risks and venture into new territory!

Who is it for?

Explora was created for Latina immigrant women interested in launching or formalizing their own businesses, designed to be accessible and enriching no matter where participants may be on their respective entrepreneurial journeys. Explora participants are resilient, innovative, and powerful beyond measure. They encounter common barriers including language access, gender and racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, isolation and fear due to immigration status. Latina entrepreneurs in our programs are part of the one million Latina headed households that live in poverty in the U.S. Our program participants work in low wage occupations, often making ends meet with two or more unstable jobs and rarely have access to health insurance and other critical benefits.

As we enter a new phase of offering the Explora virtually, as well as sharing the Explora curriculum as an online resource, we hope it will serve all individuals and/or organizations

interested in familiarizing themselves with cooperative values and exploring the possibilities of the model's impact on their own communities.

Why was it created & what makes it unique?

Explora was created to address a deficit in accessible, culturally specific, business and leadership development opportunities for the Latina immigrant community. The program stands out for its strengths-based approach, which centers the wisdom of the Latina entrepreneurs it serves; women who already lead rich, full lives and do not need saving or empowering.

Though there are many business incubation and entrepreneurial leadership programs out there, Explora is unique in that it meets participants wherever they are, allowing them the opportunity to explore business ideas and possible outcomes at their own pace in an environment safe enough to dream, and even fail. Explora plants the seed of cooperativism and business ownership, and inspires women to pursue business models that are more holistic and inclusive.

At the core of Prospera's approach is the understanding that no person or business exists in a vacuum, and therefore must engage with the world and economic models around them. Explora's curriculum engages with the inequitable distribution of wealth and the economic systems that dictate our access to resources and opportunities. It develops pathways for participants to understand their own entrepreneurial pursuits as part of a movement to build wealth, reclaim their power, and lift up their communities. Many Explora participants go on to take the training again and eventually assume leadership roles, adapting the curriculum and facilitating sessions, all of which keep the program dynamic and constantly evolving to the needs of the Latina immigrants it serves.

Key partners

- [Sustainable Economies Law Center](#) for training on legal aspects of coops
- [Centro Community Partners](#) for basic business training & planning via their app, access to microloans for graduates via KIVA platform, and follow-up TA
- [Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center](#): advanced business training for graduates and individualized business TA
- Colmenar Cooperative: Follow-up support for establishing governance and operations for new Worker Owned Cooperatives
- Established worker cooperatives: For in person tours and virtual panels sharing best practices, e.g. [Rainbow Grocery](#), [Arizmendi Bakery](#), [The Cheese Board Collective](#)
- [U.S. Federation of Worker Coops](#) - MIC (Movimiento de Inmigrantes en Cooperativas) Co-director, Claudia Arroyo has facilitated webinars in collaboration with the Federation and presented at four of their national conferences

Explora Online: how it came about in the midst of Covid-19. What's different? What are the opportunities it presents? What are the needs to roll it out?

Prospera had an Explora training planned for April 15, 2020, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit we had to make a decision: cancel the training altogether, wait to see how things would progress, or move forward with offering the training virtually for the very first time. We decided to take a leap of faith and move Explora online because we knew that as leaders in innovation and entrepreneurship, our participants needed all the support and resources we could offer to adapt quickly and creatively to this new economy.

To prepare, we did a Zoom training a week in advance to get comfortable with using it as a tool, talked to our partners and allied organizations to make sure they were willing to participate in this new format, and adapted the content of the program to the constraints of the virtual world and needs of our new reality. We evaluated the length of sessions, and found ways to keep the activities interactive, while also leaving space for screen breaks and rest periods.

Due to this new format, an opportunity presented itself. Prospera member and Vice President of the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, Daniella Preisler had contacts in New Mexico, Arizona, and Florida interested in participating. And so, for the first time, we expanded our geographic reach outside California and in so doing, facilitated rich connections across significant distances, planting the seeds for cooperative development in multiple states.

But offering Explora online has also presented challenges in that it now demands a privileged access to strong internet, the necessary devices for using Zoom, and sufficient technological literacy in order to participate. We have also had to get creative in adapting the sessions in which we usually visit local coops and connect with our cooperative partners. Since those site visits are no longer possible, we created a virtual panel featuring four worker owners from diverse cooperatives who could speak directly to the challenges and opportunities in cooperative business management during COVID-19.

Who is enrolled in the first ever Explora Online?

- Of the 26 participants who completed our intake form, more than half are from out of state. The majority of which are based in New Mexico or Arizona. 31% are in Alameda county.
- The vast majority (92%) of participants are native Spanish speakers. For 3 participants their native language is English or another language. 50% are bilingual.
- This group has a strong cooperative spirit! 81% have expressed interest in launching or joining pre-existing cooperatives. 68% consider themselves “cooperativists.”
- Only 5 of the participants (19%) already have an established business. The majority are in the process of starting a new business or have a business idea. 81% consider themselves entrepreneurs.

- 92% of participants come from low-income homes. 62% are experiencing a loss or reduction of income due to COVID-19. 50% (13) lost more than 30% of their income. 35% (9) lost 50% or more of their income.
- 69% (18) are the heads of their households
- Only 50% (13) have a savings account. 42% do not have savings of any kind.
- El 81% (21) se identifican como latino/a/x o descendencia indígena. Dos participantes son de descendencia europea (8%.) Cinco participantes no identificaron su raza.
- In terms of gender, 54% (14) identified as women, 8% (2) identified as men, and 9 participants did not specify their gender.
- Three participants are under 30 while 62% are between 20 and 49 years old. 19% (5 people) are between the ages of 50 and 59.
- 77% (20) participants were born outside of the U.S.

To learn more about the program contact made@prosperacoops.org