

# Building Community Relationships That Last: The Core of GreenStar's Diversity & Inclusion Efforts

## Background

2009/2010 - Negative community perceptions were being voiced at community events and member meetings, as well as by individual member-owners that GreenStar's stores were:

- ❖ Inaccessible to low and middle income people
- ❖ Seen as primarily a white, affluent organization that practiced a sort of passive discrimination

In addition to the financially-oriented BASICS and FLOWER programs previously implemented to address financial hardship realities in our community, we recognized that a major cultural shift was needed at the Co-op, and that our staff needed to better reflect the community at large in order for GreenStar to become a truly inclusive organization.

## The Most Critical Step We Took In Becoming a More Inclusive Organization

Established Quarterly Meetings with a group of "key critics" including directors of community centers, leaders of multi-cultural organizations and member-owners who expressed willingness to meet with members of our Management team and Board to discuss the Co-op's perception, and help work with us to change it. We listened wholeheartedly to their constructive feedback, and took action accordingly.

## Examples of Actions Taken as a Result of our Community Partnership Meetings:

1. Engaged in difficult conversations about the perceptions people had of GreenStar, and discussed solutions on how we could change perceptions through positive action
2. Drafted a statement of diversity & inclusion that now appears prominently on our materials, including job postings, application, job descriptions, newsletter, New Member form, FLOWER application, website, etc.

***GreenStar Co-op is committed to being an inclusive organization free from discrimination. We seek out and welcome people from diverse communities to participate in a community-owned cooperative business structure.***

3. Reviewed and revised the language of our job postings, interview questions, applications and other HR materials
4. Shared our job postings with the group and other community organizations in order to recruit a diverse group of potential job applicants.
5. Discussed hiring practices, staff training and other job-related issues to ensure success in hiring and managing a diverse group of employees. In 2015, we "Banned the Box" (removed the box on our job application regarding past criminal record).
  - Adopted a focus on hiring for attitude
  - HR Manager serves on board of Diversity Consortium of Tompkins County
  - Recently partnered with Ultimate Reentry Opportunity, a local initiative dedicated to facilitating collective community work between private and public sectors, and returning residents to actively transform the culture and process of reentry following incarceration. GreenStar is committing to interviewing candidates from the program and, in addition to possible employment, potentially providing job training opportunities for program participants.
6. Emphasize staff training and participation in Diversity oriented workshops and events, including:
  - UnDoing Racism: an outstanding workshop by The People's Institute For Survival and Beyond (community training)
  - Locally sponsored Talking Circles (community opportunity)
  - Gender Identity (3 separate in-house training)
  - Micro Aggressions training (in-house training)
  - Community Access to Healthy Food: Where Cooperative Living and the Black Lives Matter Movement Intersect (in-house training co-facilitated by co-founder of BLM Ithaca Chapter, a local farmer/activist of color, & GreenStar Council member)
  - Participating in community-wide read of Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Besides community-wide participation, GreenStar formed its own book reading group for staff, facilitated by two individuals of color, a staff member and a member-owner.
7. We teamed with a local community center and soup kitchen to host the PBS 3-part series *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. Staff from all three organizations attended the viewings, and participated in facilitated discussion afterward.

8. Hired local authors for articles focused on community events and diversity topics.
9. We inverted our Advertising budget with our Outreach and Donations budget to ensure that we increased our investment in community events, sponsorship and outreach.
10. Drafted an anti-racism statement that appears with our mission statement at the entrance of the Co-op  
***GreenStar is an anti-racism organization. We purposefully identify, discuss, and challenge issues of race and color and the impacts they have on the organization, its systems and its people.***

## The Work of our NonProfit Affiliate Complements the Co-op's Food Access & Inclusion Efforts

GreenStar Community Projects (GSCP) has committed its work to food justice and sustainability in our county, including

1. Networking Meetings – These quarterly meetings bring together stakeholders in our local food system together to coordinate and brainstorm solutions to create a more robust local food system. One example of resultant action included:
  - The formation of a Communication Action Group that presented a proposal to GSCP for a Food Justice Web Portal for the community. GSCP succeeded in securing grant funding for the portal, which was named *Hot Potato Press* and launched in 2015. Visit the site at <http://hotpotatopress.org>.
2. Community Dinners – The goal of these dinners is to give greater voice to more members of our community around the issues of sustainability and healthy food access. Paid for by GSCP, the dinners are hosted by and for low income participants in their homes, with conversations centering on food access and food equity.

## The Outcomes

- ❖ Our Staff quickly diversified:

Staff identifying as Non-White Yr Ending 2009 = 3.6% of 195 employees  
 Staff identifying as Non-White in Yr Ending 2016 = 14.8% of 236 employees

- Community members who traditionally shied away from the Co-op started shopping with us because they began to see “people that looked like me” and found it a much more comfortable place to shop
- Staff diversity helped perpetuate itself as positive word of mouth circulated throughout our community that the Co-op was a positive place to work

- ❖ Strong Financial Performance, much of this related to our community building and food access work

	FYE 2009	FYE 2015	FYE 2016*
Annual Sales	\$13.4MM	\$19.6MM	\$21.2MM
Low Income Discount as % of Sales	0%	0.59%	0.4%
Profit Margin After Discounts as % of Sales	36.43%	36.0%	36.2%
Advertising % of Sales	0.69%	0.34%	0.32%
Donations & Outreach % of Sales	0.02%	0.20%	0.24%
Total shown expenses as % of Sales	0.71%	0.54%	0.56%
Sales Growth vs Prior Year	6.32%	1.63%	8.16%

\*Collegetown satellite store expansion year

### 2010 - 2015

46% Sales Growth Overall  
 Average Sales Growth of 7.7% Annually  
 Effects of New Normal on Sales Began in 2014

### 2016 Collegetown Expansion

58% Sales Growth since 2010  
 Average Sales Growth of 8.3% Annually

- ❖ Strong new member-owner growth and retention:

- New Membership sales grew 28% and our total membership grew over 49% between 2010 and 2015 due, in part, to our commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- In 2016, the opening of a satellite store in the Collegetown neighborhood, located just off the Cornell University campus, a noted food desert, enabled us to further expand our diversity and inclusion efforts to focus on another key demographic group that's been underrepresented at GreenStar, young college students. Since the late August opening in 2016, nearly 900 individuals, mostly young students, have joined the Co-op at the Collegetown store alone. Many others heard about our two downtown stores from Collegetown staff, and visited and joined at the downtown locations. New Membership growth in 2016 alone was 34% (2,577 new memberships), with a resultant increase in total membership of 10% vs. 2015. Since 2010, our diversity and inclusion efforts have helped us achieve an overall growth rate in new memberships of 71%, and an increase in membership of over 68%.

## Contact Information

If you would like more information on GreenStar's FLOWER program, or our Diversity & Inclusion efforts, please contact us!

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