Gila Farm Cooperative

Building a Model for Sustainable Leading and Learning: A Case Study of a Refugee Farmers’ Cooperative in Arizona

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INTRODUCTION

After almost a year of preparation Gila Farm Cooperative’s community supported agriculture (CSA) had its first customer pickup in January 2012. Formed as a marketing cooperative by the non-profit International Refugee Committee (IRC) to provide markets for refugee farmers in the Phoenix area, Gila Farm Cooperative (GFC) currently has 22 members from four countries. As in any new social enterprise, the cooperative faces many challenges to reaching long term stability but additionally, the cooperative faces further barriers because of its unique membership base. Refugees settling in the U.S. face many difficulties. In addition to dealing with the trauma of relocating from their home countries, limited knowledge of English, social isolation and discrimination are a few of the many challenges facing refugees in the process of navigating the culture and geography of their new homes in the United States. Considering these barriers, establishing GFC is a remarkable achievement, but now the cooperative must look ahead to the next phase of its development.

The cooperative was formed in 2011 with, and still receives, substantial assistance from IRC, much of it emanating from federal seed grants. Given IRC’s limited capacity to provide long term operational funding, there is a critical need for the cooperative to develop greater independence from the IRC in the short to medium term. The purpose of this study is to utilize a social enterprise framework to provide a descriptive analysis of the structure and operational processes that form the basis of the cooperative and to investigate the degree of autonomy that is both possible and desirable given the current perspectives and capabilities of its members and the opportunities and constraints presented by its external environment. On this basis, we offer preliminary recommendations for fostering a cooperative model of development via supportive actions in transferring greater operational responsibilities from IRC staff to GFC members as the organization continues to mature.

While the immediate utility of the study is to assist GFC and IRC to find a way forward in this critical initial period of the cooperative's development, its significance extends well beyond these two organizations. As the experience of refugee farming in the U.S. grows, we hope that the experience of Gila Farm cooperative will inform other experiments in social enterprise. Others involved in marketing cooperatives in economically marginalized communities may also find the report provides insights useful to help them make more informed development decisions in their local context. Finally, for students of the social economy more generally, the information provided throughout the report may contribute to further research focused on cooperative development and the incubation of social enterprises by nonprofit umbrella organizations.

The study was undertaken by a small research team connected to Arizona State University’s, Social Economy Arizona (SEAZ) project, on behalf of IRC Phoenix. Under the guidance of the IRC's Gila Farm Cooperative coordinator, the research for this report took place from February through May 2012 during which time the researchers conducted interviews with cooperative board members and IRC support staff. Researchers attended cooperative meetings, observed training sessions, shadowed the coordinator, and toured CSA gardening sites, farmers’ market stalls, and a refugee community office to observe business operations, administrative functions, and farmer support.

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1 We owe special thanks to Jessica Woiderski, IRC Coordinator and Project Manager, for her invaluable mentoring and assistance in making this project possible. We would also like to thank the farmers and IRC staff who generously gave of their time to enable us to complete the project.

2 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between local farmers and community members who support them by paying for their farm fresh produce upfront, typically, for a regularly scheduled weekly or month food pick-up or delivery.

3 The partnership between SEAZ and IRC, which began in 2010, was supported in part by “Social Innovation and Social Enterprise Development, a ASU/Kauffman Foundation Pathways to Entrepreneurship grant (Vanna Gonzales, P.I., Nancy Jurik, Co-P.I.).

4 The research procedure is summarized in Appendix A.
We begin the report by introducing relevant empirical background including information on basic concepts integral to GFC’s makeup and a brief history of the cooperative's development. In Section II we present an analytical description of the organizational context, the structure of the cooperative and its internal processes. Section III presents our analysis of members' capabilities, attitudes and aspirations against the organizational needs of the cooperative in two parts: challenges and the opportunities. In Section IV, the concluding section of the report, we discuss our findings and make recommendations to help GFC transition towards a model of leading and learning that will allow it to become a more autonomous, cooperative enterprise.

**Empirical and Conceptual Background**

As part of its mission to help resettle refugees in Arizona, IRC Phoenix had the idea to help form a marketing cooperative. In the short term, the cooperative provided a solution to the need to find a market for refugees’ existing crop production, especially since it was soon exceeding regular family consumption. In the words of an IRC staff member, “[Gila Farm Cooperative] came about because...we discovered that we were good in our production but production without marketing will not bring money to the pockets of the farmer so our need was markets." In the longer term, the hope was that Gila Farm Cooperative would enable refugees to develop a more sustainable future in farming and urban agriculture.

Turning the idea of the cooperative into a reality was made possible by the success of IRC’s New Roots refugee farmer food security program. This program, started in 2007, provides training and resources to help new refugee farmers take up farming as a source of livelihood. The program was a resounding success to the point that within a couple of years the lack of markets for farmer produce had become a significant problem. As a result, IRC realized that they had to create a demand-side support program to match the success of the supply-side.

There has been a growing interest in farming in the process of refugee resettlement throughout the United States (Brown 2011; Gorman 2010; Sturm 2010). It can assist refugees to become economically self-sufficient, help refugee communities develop employment and capital resources, and enhance the integration of refugees into the mainstream. Additionally, farming provides access to healthy and culturally preferred produce and fits well with the rural and farming background of many refugees, allowing “peace, joy and continuity with their former lives” (www.gilafarm.org). The federal funding generated to support programs like IRC’s New Roots has been an important factor in developing refugee farming as has funding generated through U.S. Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement. Another important factor has been the alternative agriculture movement, which has created growing demand in urban areas for local, small-scale, organic produce thereby increasing economic opportunities for small farmers (Lass, Bevis, Stevenson, Hendrickson, & Ruhf, 2003; Steinhoff, 2005, Williamson, Imbroscio, & Alperovitz, 2003). But, as New Roots farmers have found, although the demand may be there, connecting with consumers is not so simple, particularly for immigrant and refugee farmers. While the new food movements of the last decade have spawned resurgence in locally grown (often organic) produce, less than one percent of the U.S. population identify themselves as farmers (NASS, 2007). Given the many difficulties of competing with bigger producers, small farmers in the U.S. have historically turned to cooperatives as a solution to this, and other, problems (Curl, 2010; Fairbairn, 2003).

Cooperatives provide small producers such as farmers a variety of benefits. Through the provision of mutual aid, including the sharing of costs and risks, and the development of processing and marketing enterprises, cooperatives allow small farmers to compete in the capitalist marketplace while maintaining some control over their own business (Briscoe & Ward, 2005a; Curl, 2010; Fairbairn, 2003; Ward, 2005). The success of the cooperative approach to agriculture is reflected in the substantial number of farming
cooperatives in the U.S. Farming cooperatives, especially when linked to alternative agriculture, contribute to local community development economically, socially, and environmentally by halting rural decline and preventing urban sprawl (Briscoe & Ward, 2005b; Sumner & Llewelyn, 2010; Williamson et al., 2003), as well as by shortening the distance between consumers and producers (Moroney, Briscoe, McCarthy, O’Shaughnessy, & Ward, 2009). Alternative agriculture has led to the development of innovative new markets such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture for which marketing cooperatives can be important in overcoming limitations of farmer resource, time and productive capacity (Moroney et al., 2009; Sumner & Llewelyn, 2010; Ward, 2005). The benefits of cooperatives however, extend beyond operational expediency.

The cooperative movement is founded on basic values that are broadly shared with those of the alternative food movement and with refugee resettlement programs. In addition to sharing a strong social purpose, these values include fostering diverse communities, inclusiveness, equity, fairness, sustainability, and a commitment to human rights. Cooperatives embody these values within a set of principles established by the International Cooperative Alliance. Additionally, the United Nations recognizes "the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development, in particular recognizing their impact on poverty reduction, employment generation, and social integration" (United Nations, n.d.). In this sense, both ideationally and pragmatically, cooperatives offer a useful strategy for refugee resettlement.

Against this background IRC set out to establish Gila Farm Cooperative. In early 2011 it received funding through a USDA Farmers’ Market Promotion Program to hire a staff member to initiate and manage the early development of the cooperative and enlisted the services of a pro-bono lawyer. Around 26 refugee farmers, representing four diverse cultural and language groups (Somali-Bantu, Uzbeki, Togolese, and Iraqi) already in the New Roots program accepted an invitation to join the cooperative. They farm a 27-acre area located in Pinal County, just south of Phoenix. In 2011, representatives from each group became board members and participated in drafting the articles of incorporation and by-laws for GFC, a process which was completed in October of that year. Other tasks involved in setting up the cooperative included obtaining insurance, agreeing on membership fees, and establishing a governance structure.

Established shortly after the foundation of the cooperative, Gila Farm Cooperatives’ CSA has become intertwined with the identity of the cooperative, so much so that it is difficult to distinguish between it and the cooperative. As evident by many case studies and examples found in the literature, CSAs are typically operated as a single operator / farmer proprietary business. A key exception to this is World Peas, which has a refugee multi-farm/farmer model (World Peas, n.d.) though it is a non-profit enterprise and not legally incorporated as a cooperative. While the efficacy of cooperatives has been shown in farmers' markets (Moroney et al, 2009), they are not a common model for CSAs in the United States to adopt, though there are other noteworthy examples such as Local Harvest in Weare, New Hampshire (Perry and Franzblau, 2010). Thus, Gila Farm Cooperatives stands out not only for being one of the first known marketing cooperatives involving culturally diverse refugee farmers, but also for its attempt to utilize the cooperative form to develop its CSA.

Through a halting process of development spear-headed by the IRC coordinator and project manager, GFC began selling cooperative members’ produce through their CSA in January 2012. Up to that point, it has proceeded through a number of the initial steps recognizable in the formation of many cooperatives. Currently, it is in what Cropp and Zeuli (2004: 74) identify as the "Early Startup" phase in which it has

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5 There were 2,310 agricultural cooperatives in the U.S. in 2010 (nine in Arizona) of which 138 were fruit and vegetable marketing coops (USDA, 2011).
6 For an overview of the ICA cooperative principles, see http://www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html.
7 See Appendix B for a summary timeline of the GFC startup.
8 Though Massachusetts, where World Peas is located has cooperative incorporation law, Arizona does not. For more on the Massachusetts law, see http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXXII/Chapter157
9 For a detailed overview of Gila Farm Cooperatives’ CSA see http://gilafarm.org/about.
begun operating as a business.\footnote{This said, several initial steps in development, including undertaking a feasibility study and developing a concrete business plan do not appear to have been completed, a point to which we will return in our analysis.} Though \textit{Early Startup} is the final step of the development phase, it may also be considered the first step of a transitional phase from a startup operation to a viable, financially sustainable operation. The IRC has been instrumental in the formation of the cooperative and remains so in this transitional phase, though the cooperative is intended to become a sustainable social enterprise in its own right, a theme of central interest in this report.

\section*{SECTION II - ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS}

In this section we provide a descriptive analysis of Gila Farm Cooperative’s organizational structure and processes. Based on primary sources, participant observation, and interviews with the GFC coordinator and IRC staff, we introduce readers to the key components of the cooperative, including its key stakeholders and administrative functions as well as the broader organizational field in which it exists. This organizational overview serves both to provide readers a clearer sense of GFC’s position vis-à-vis the IRC as well as the cooperatives’ relationship to the CSA. In addition, it provides a useful baseline for our subsequent discussion of GFC’s key stakeholders, the refugee farmers that comprise the board.

**GFC and the Social Enterprise Model**

GFC exists within a complex, extended organizational structure. Analyzing the organizational context is important because it clarifies the linkages between related organizational entities, their relationships to one another, and their relevance to the success of the cooperative. This is particularly helpful in the case of developing social enterprises, understood as organizations which have both an economic and social purpose. As underscored by Sutia Kim Alter (2006), the context of the social enterprise can be more complex than in traditional non-profit or for-profit enterprises. Following Alter’s outline of social enterprise models based on their mission and money relationships, we begin our analysis by identifying "the relationship between business activities and social programs, [and] its purpose" (Alter, 2006: 214).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Social enterprise model of Gila Farm Cooperative (adapted from Alter, 2006)}
\end{figure}
Figure 1 above shows our interpretation of the social enterprise model for Gila Farm Cooperative. Understood as a social enterprise, Gila Farm Cooperative formed in order to create social and economic value for its beneficiaries, the members. However, by operating in tandem with the IRC and in conjunction with farmer-members, GFC functions as a hybrid organization whose business operations rely heavily on technical support and human capital from the IRC, and its New Roots program in particular. Additionally, its social aims are highly connected to those of the IRC as the country’s largest secular resettlement agency, as well as its unique member-base, comprised of ethnically and culturally distinctive refugee communities. As a result, the value generated by the cooperative is derived from a variety of overlapping organizations and constituencies.

As is common among social enterprises in the initial stages of development, GFC is not currently financially self-sufficient. For operational support it relies significantly on the IRC’s New Roots program and a grant procured by IRC staff from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP). Yet, by acting as an intermediary organization that connects agricultural producers to the market (the consumers), it delivers economic value to refugee farmers, as its key beneficiaries. Functioning as a cooperative, its key beneficiaries are also its main producers. Refugee farmers, as cooperative members, are paid the consumer price for their produce less a commission that is retained by the cooperative to pay for operating costs. Additional economic value is delivered to members through shared costs. For example, the cost of farmer insurance is much lower when obtained collectively through cooperative membership than for individual producers.

The significant synergy between IRC and the cooperative in its business operations is mirrored in its social mission. Social value is delivered to beneficiaries by both the social enterprise (GFC) and the IRC as a nonprofit social service provider, which functions as an umbrella organization. While the cooperative provides social value to its members in a variety of ways, including membership in a learning community, social and economic solidarity, and democratic participation, social value is also delivered by IRC to refugee farmers (both cooperative and non-cooperative members) through the New Roots program. New Roots existed prior to the cooperative but the value of its goods and services has arguably been enhanced since the cooperative was introduced by providing beginning gardeners/farmers another pathway for growth and development thereby making farming a more attractive prospect to refugees. Cooperative members also continue to receive social value from IRC in the form of agricultural and business training, and technical support.

Less noted, but equally important, is the value the cooperative generates to the community. For individual consumers located in the greater Phoenix area, GFC provides an additional source of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. GFC has helped meet a growing consumer demand as Phoenix area residents have become more aware of, and sensitive to, a wide range of environmental problems associated with the farm to factory production process, such as loss of biodiversity as well as public health threats from heavy utilization of pesticides and artificial chemicals and foodstuffs. Beyond providing value for individual consumers, as part of a growing urban agricultural movement, GFC generates significant value for communities more broadly by helping to raise awareness and interest in

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11 In the United States, the implementation of refugee resettlement is undertaken by a wide variety of third sector or “voluntary” agencies, which contract with the U.S. State Department to provide all initial services such as housing, financial assistance and job training and referrals. The U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) provides these agencies a grant for each refugee they are assigned. The IRC is the largest of the secular agencies. The majority of these agencies are either religious organizations (e.g. Church World Services) or have their origins in religious based charity organizations (i.e. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Inc.).

12 In practice, the cooperative also accepts produce from non-member refugee gardeners and when absolutely necessary, from non-refugee gardeners. However, priority is given to members and the commission charged to them is less than non-members.

13 Member control is one of the cooperative principles (see note 6) related to workplace democracy. By providing a vehicle by which refugee farmers, representing different ethnic and linguistic communities, are directly involved in the operation and development of the cooperative, GFC provides a forum for generating greater democratic participation.
small scale, less intensive farming, enhancing the aesthetic value of the land that its farmers and gardeners cultivate, and increasing the visibility of refugee farmers more broadly.

Juxtaposing the social enterprise model onto the organizational field in which Gila Farm Cooperative is embedded, Figures 2 and 3 (below) distinguish its production and marketing functions more clearly. Though the two domains are interdependent, they are operationally distinct in terms of funding, services and staffing.

![Figure 2: IRC Phoenix Production support context for refugee farmers](image)

As indicated on the production side illustrated in Figure 2, IRC provides a variety of services through its New Roots and Micro-Enterprise programs designed to help refugees become productive, independent agricultural producers. Support services to new gardeners, for example, include finding the plot, leasing costs, land preparation, water, seed, training and onsite technical support. New refugees receive a greater level of support for working small "market gardener" sized plots for two seasons, after which they are expected to establish a greater degree of financial independence. As the gardeners gain experience and start to generate revenue, they are encouraged to use their plots to fund ongoing agricultural production as the level of New Roots support is reduced. If they decide to make farming their main livelihood and career, gardeners then progress to become "farmers," at which point the new roots program will help them find a small farm of several acres, for which the farmer is expected to pay the lease.

Refugees are required to be enrolled as gardeners in the New Roots program before they can become members of the cooperative. All farmers, including those who are not members of the cooperative, receive training and technical support from New Roots as well as business development support including small loans and management training from the IRC microenterprise program. Moreover, some refugee communities have associations that provide a variety of social services to their members, such as the Somali Bantu Association of Greater Phoenix. These associations may also receive small loans from the IRC microenterprise program and may, for example, be the lessee on farm land.
Beyond these specific programs, the IRC provides a broad base of support for the GFC, including development staff; translation services; vehicle use and access to IRC office facilities (e.g. office space, computers, printers/copiers); and miscellaneous expenses (e.g. Farmigo license). In addition, through its network of contacts, the IRC provides access to external support such as pro-bono legal representation (up to 50 hours per year). The IRC, in turn, relies on a variety of federally funded programs and/or directly funded grants from the United States Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) (e.g. the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), the Refugee Microenterprise Program (RMP) and the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP)). As indicated above, the Gila Farm Cooperative in particular is supported by a grant from USDA’s Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP).

On the marketing side, the Gila Farm Cooperative was created to develop markets for its members' produce (see Figure 3 below), more specifically to generate greater demand for refugee gardeners’ and farmers’ produce. Thus, while the IRC provides a variety of resources and support services, including staff and office space, the cooperatives main, and currently only, market outlet is its CSA. Though it appears difficult for both farmers and other organizational stakeholders to disentangle one from the other, conceptually, the CSA serves as the key financial engine of the cooperative. The CSA buys produce from member farmers and, when necessary, from non-member farmers or gardeners. Though cooperative members have a presence within local farmer markets, and the cooperative is actively looking at developing additional market outlets including restaurant direct sales, its sole connection to consumers, and thus its main base of non-grant revenue is its CSA.14

![Diagram of IRC Phoenix Gila Farm Cooperative Marketing Support Context for Refugee Farmers](image)

Figure 3: IRC Phoenix Gila Farm Cooperative Marketing support context for refugee farmers. (*) indicates markets in development or not yet developed

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14 During its first Spring in operation the CSA had approximately twenty customers. Due to problems with crop damage in the winter harvest, a decision was made to keep the customer base small in order to insure supply and maximize customer satisfaction.
Thinking about GFC as a social enterprise is useful to GFC members, particularly as it moves forward in its development. More specifically, the social enterprise model can help to crystallize strategic direction and goals by generating a variety of questions pertaining to the relationship between the organizational infrastructure in which the cooperative is embedded and its membership base. For example, how does the cooperative meet members' expectations for economic value delivery? What importance is placed by different stakeholders on maintaining the social value delivered to members and non-member refugees? And how much of the support currently received from IRC in the form of goods and services do different stakeholders expect the cooperative to provide for itself and how should this be accomplished? However, in order to begin to answer these questions more information is needed about GFC’s main operational and administrative processes, more specifically those connecting the structure of the cooperative to the CSA.

**Key Organizational Processes**

In this section we discuss the processes that define what it takes to run the cooperative on a day-to-day basis. Our analysis summarizes the skills, knowledge, resources and effort involved in managing the cooperatives’ key tasks, almost all of which are currently undertaken by IRC staff. Though it is our primary intention for this analysis to shed light on the GFC’s current operational and administrative processes, because the cooperative is still in its infancy, it provides a valuable base-line for future development. Thus, it could be useful in creating an operational manual for future cooperative members and administrative staff.

The cooperative coordinator, who is technically an IRC project manager, currently shoulders most of the responsibility for running both the cooperative and the CSA. Thus, as the cooperative develops and begins to function more autonomously, members will need to assume more responsibility for a variety of these tasks. Otherwise, they will need to procure additional funding or find another means of meeting the cooperatives’ staffing needs.

The following discussion provides a detailed overview of the key tasks involved in the CSA’s main operational cycle, CSA administration, and the administration of the cooperative more broadly. This descriptive information is accompanied by a preliminary assessment of the ease by which cooperative members, all of which are recent refugees, could undertake the task. We use a three prong ordinal ranking of basic, intermediate and advanced tasks, which can be distinguished on the basis of the competencies and proficiencies needed to perform the tasks as well as barriers which may undermine participants’ capacity to perform them successfully:

- **Basic tasks** require limited knowledge of the business beyond a general understanding of the main operations. These tasks do not rely on specialized resource use though require general competencies such as the ability to understand and communicate needed information in the English language, basic numeracy and administrative skills.

- **Intermediate tasks.** In addition to fulfilling basic criteria these tasks require either a specialized functional competency, such as computer literacy, or else more advanced proficiency, for example, basic business and interpersonal skills needed to sustain relationships with American consumers. In addition, these tasks may require access to specific resources such as computer and internet access, as well as experienced gained on the job.

- **Advanced tasks.** These tasks require greater capabilities than those listed as intermediate criteria, more specifically, a specialized functional competency like computer literacy and an advanced general competency (such as English proficiency), or multiple advanced general competencies. In addition, they require a broader base of knowledge of business operations and a higher degree of responsibility. Like intermediate tasks, these tasks may also require access to specialized
resources but further, they may also require a higher level of education and authorization, such as access to banking facilities.

Rather than focusing on the performance needs of each task, an undertaking that would require considerably more research, we underscore the feasibility of tasks and thus highlight both the advantages and challenges presented in transitioning cooperative members into positions of responsibility for each set of tasks. In so doing we hope to clarify the breadth and depth of responsibilities required to sustain Gila Farm Cooperative, thus establishing a baseline for developing future plans to enable refugee farmers to assume a greater stake in the operation and management of the cooperative.

The CSA Operational Cycle

The CSA operational cycle consists of the process by which the cooperative receives produce from multiple producers, processes it, and distributes it to multiple customers on a weekly basis. Figure 4 below shows the tasks within the cycle, the actors who participate in them, the resources used, and essential skills and knowledge required. Each task is performed once in sequential order (top to bottom in Figure 4), Monday through Wednesday of each week.

Figure 4: Actors – Tasks – Resources: CSA operational cycle listing essential skills and knowledge required to perform tasks.

The weekly cycle begins on Monday morning when the cooperative coordinator places orders with farmers and gardeners to “build” this week’s customer boxes. Specialized CSA software is used to keep track of the orders needed to complete a box of items totaling $20 in value and to record farmer
transactions.\textsuperscript{15} The aim is to provide each customer a box with a balanced assortment of six or seven items (e.g. roots, squashes, greens, herbs) at a $2 to $3 value each, though the actual produce provided varies week by week. Once the box contents are finalized they are transcribed to the weekly newsletter and an appropriate recipe added. The color printed newsletter, which is produced using Mailchimp, a marketing and customer communication web application, contains recent CSA information and short articles about the farmers and the produce.

On Tuesday morning, the coordinator visits the farms on the order list to collect the produce. While on site the coordinator provides training in harvesting and preparation (washing, bunching, and bagging) to the gardener / farmer as needed. Current members farm at Gila Farm in the south east valley but other refugee gardeners are at several gardens around the valley. If produce does not meet the order specification (quantity and quality), then the order is renegotiated or cancelled and replacements may have to be sought. This is an important component of the process as successful delivery depends on the reliability of the farmers in filling their orders. As a result, the GFC board has recently decided to implement a "three strikes and you're out" policy to bar producers from future orders if they renge on orders three times. Once the orders have been filled, receipts are issued to farmers and produce is transported in coolers to the IRC offices where it is attractively laid out in the pickup area just before the late Tuesday afternoon pickup time. Over the next two hours, customers arrive, fill up their box (or bag), pick up a newsletter, and check themselves off the pickup list. During this time, the coordinator is on hand to greet customers, answer questions, take occasional payments, and clean up when finished.\textsuperscript{16} The final task in the weekly cycle is to update producer transactions in the CSA administration system with data from the receipts that were given to producers at harvest collection.

Using the assessment criteria indicated above, the CSA operation cycle reveals a diversity of task types. Yet, of the five tasks highlighted in Figure one, Customer Pickup is the only basic task. While refugee farmers' effectiveness in interacting with consumers is enhanced the greater their proficiency in English, during customer pickup, farmers are able to carry out their responsibilities with a minimum knowledge of English and/or basic business skills. Other than procuring transport to the pickup point, there are few prerequisites needed by farmers at Customer Pickup. However, the remaining tasks associated with the CSA operational cycle can be considered either intermediate (e.g. writing and composing newsletters and reconciling orders) or advanced (e.g. placing orders and harvest collection). These tasks require access to specialized resources (i.e. computers, phones, a reliable vehicle and driver’s license) and have significant performance requirements associated with them, including specialized knowledge and skills. The intermediate tasks require not only competency in spoken English, but proficiency in written English. In addition they involve specialized computer skills to be able to utilize the software needed to carry out specific office-based tasks, as well as enter and utilize a wide variety of data. The two advanced tasks (placing orders and harvest collection) demand higher-order skills. More specifically, farmers must be able to interact effectively with a wide range of stake-holders, from consumer-customers to other staff and producers. This involves a high level of communication and interpersonal skills but also a wide variety of managerial skills needed to effectively coordinate and supervise others (i.e. logistic and organizational skills related to administration). Moreover, these skills demand an integrated knowledge of both farming and business activity, specialized knowledge of market conditions, and the ability to perform more complex tasks related to the use of administrative software.

\textsuperscript{15} GFC uses two main software applications: Farmigo, an online CSA management tool for which it has a subscription, and an internal IRC Access database with farmer and gardener details as well as order and payment details.

\textsuperscript{16} Payments at pickup time may include late subscriptions, additional produce sales, or other ad hoc sales such as the GFC recipe book. Subscriptions are normally paid online or on the first pickup of a new session.
CSA Administration

CSA administration, unlike CSA Operation, is not an integrated process but rather, as illustrated in Figure 5 below, a loose collection of seven diverse tasks (see Appendix E for a summary). Some of these tasks, such as customer sign up and special orders, relate specifically to supporting the weekly CSA process while others tend more towards business development more broadly.

CSA support tasks include maintaining producers, paying producers, and signing up customers. Maintaining the cooperative’s database of farmer and gardener information is performed on an ad hoc basis by the coordinator using the CSA management software. Producers are paid at the end of each month when the coordinator writes checks based on a report generated by the CSA management system for the produce supplied that month. Customer signup happens at the start of a new CSA season through an on-line process, with customers paying either in cash, by check, or with a bank card, though some customers pay at the first pickup as well. Each transaction is recorded and transposed into the CSA system, including special orders, which are typically placed by customers via the CSA website. The coordinator must frequently check for special orders, and using knowledge of producers, place orders with farmers or gardeners who can supply the order, and coordinate delivery to the customer.
Business development tasks include customer relations, farm visits, and general administrative tasks. There are a broad range of tasks involved in keeping up customer relations. These include keeping up with and responding to customer questions and needs, reminding customers about weekly pick-up and renewals, and recruiting new customers. From time to time the coordinator will visit farms and gardens both to maintain on-going communication with individual farmers and to get a first-hand update on crop availability and quality. On-site, the coordinator checks production and provides consultation. When production related, consultation is most often sought directly from IRC’s New Roots staff; however, the coordinator provides valuable marketing related advice to gardeners and farmers. For example, she routinely provides producers information about what crops are in demand as well as advice about how producers can work together to best meet this demand. In addition to managing production, general business administration tasks, such as book keeping, are also among the key responsibilities of the coordinator.

Relating these tasks to our three pronged assessment criteria reveals that the tasks involved in CSA administration are either advanced (e.g. Pay Producers, Customer Sign Up, Special Orders, Farm Visits, and General Administration) or intermediate (e.g. Maintain Producers and Customer Relations); no tasks in this area can be classified as basic. All tasks - with the possible exception of customer relations - require either the ability to drive to a variety of locations around the valley or to get to the IRC office, as well as proficiency in both reading and writing English. English language skills are important for expanding the CSA’s consumer market, cultivating good customer relations, particularly over the phone, and farm visits. Because farmers come from different language backgrounds, it is often difficult to communicate subtleties in meaning, particularly regarding delicate and/or sensitive information among farmers that do not know one another well. As a result, even with the presence of translators, it would be important for farm visits to be undertaken by someone who is able to communicate clearly and skillfully in English. Beyond language skills, computer literacy is required for intermediate level CSA administrative operations, for example, the ability to navigate Farmigo and/or communicate via email with customers.

Advanced tasks require a combination of skills as well as complex processes that are more difficult to master. Whereas learning to navigate Farmigo can be broken down into steps, which can be taught in a series of specialized trainings, the type of integrative business knowledge needed for advanced tasks requires a combination of experience, a specialized skill set, and knowledge related to small-scale farm production, marketing and basic business operations. Activities such as tracking CSA customer payments and cutting checks to producers require a fairly good understanding of American business banking as well as access to a wide variety of highly sensitive information, such as bank account numbers. Paying producers, customer sign up, and filling specialized orders all require specific authorization for access to financial systems in addition to a variety of technical skills. Though they are not often considered skills requiring specialized knowledge, given that many refugees have a rural background in their home countries and have only been in the United States for a short period of time, the kinds of skills needed for example to operate an EFT merchant terminal would more than likely require fairly intensive on the job training. While all intermediary and advanced tasks related to CSA administration are currently undertaken by the cooperative coordinator, in the future the scope and complexity of these tasks will grow therefore necessitating greater involvement, either directly or indirectly, of cooperative members.

Cooperative Administration

In order to meet their institutional design goals, cooperatives, like other forms of business, require specific administrative activities and task. Though related to its CSA administrative tasks, GFC’s four main cooperative administration tasks involve the governance of the cooperative as a whole, and are therefore not only distinct, but more complex (see Figure 3 below).
General meetings are formally administered meetings open to all members for the purpose of voting on cooperative business. As specified in the GFC bylaws, board members are elected during the annual general meeting held in August/September though special meetings may be called whenever deemed necessary. By contrast, board meetings take place monthly and are attended by GFC’s five board members (all refugee farmers), as well as the cooperative’s coordinator (an IRC staff member) and an external pro-bono lawyer (recruited by IRC).

While general meetings deal with elections, changes to bylaws, or matters that board members decide should involve the whole membership, board meetings are concerned with strategic and tactical issues, and can also involve day-to-day operational tasks such as updating membership lists. Although board members take an active role in these meetings, they currently rely to a great extent on the coordinator and lawyer for their preparation, orchestration, and follow-up.

In addition to moderating, meeting organization responsibilities include setting the agenda, notifying members, scheduling resources, recording and distributing the minutes, and procuring translators. All cooperative meetings use interpreters for each language group present.

Other cooperative administration tasks include member liaison and record maintenance. Due to the diversity of the membership and the communication difficulties this presents, representation at the board level is organized into “districts” where each district is defined on a linguistic and cultural basis. It is board members’ duty to communicate and build relationships among and between cooperative members in their respective districts. In addition to keeping members informed of board meeting discussions and

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17 To date the IRC has hosted office space for all GFC meetings as well as meeting preparation.

18 The process of conducting formal meetings is largely a new concept to most GFC board members. According to the GFC’s lawyer, “...it has been a struggle to try to get [board members] used to the formalities and not just let [IRC Staff] and me make decisions”. Overall, the approach has been to have board members gradually take on more responsibility and a more active role while trying “to not force it on them but get them used to doing business”.

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decisions, board members are responsible for fielding suggestions and problems from their respective refugee farmer communities, as well as ensuring membership information is up-to-date and quarterly membership fees collected. It is up to each community to determine how board members will interact with their districts. The Somali Bantus, for example, the largest district, hold regular meetings with members at their association office. Other board members are able to maintain regular contact with fellow members through work at their common farm. Lastly, there are a variety of specialized tasks that involve managing the cooperative as a whole. These include tasks such as book keeping, filing taxes, and making sure that the organization is maintaining its legal and financial obligations in keeping with its incorporation status as a Cooperative Marketing Association.

With the exception of record maintenance, all cooperative administrative tasks are intermediate tasks. While legal counsel and other specialized consultants, most notably an accountant, will be needed to take care of many of the tasks involved in record maintenance, a board member or paid staff member of the cooperative will need advanced knowledge of the cooperative as well as a broad array of specialized skills in order to coordinate these tasks and ensure appropriate oversight. Thus, given the exacting nature of this work, and the significant legal and financial consequences of any misstep, bookkeeping and related management tasks must be considered advance tasks. By contrast, management of general meetings, board meetings and membership liaison can be considered intermediate tasks. They require considerable working knowledge of the cooperative but few specialized skills which cannot be acquired during on-the-job experience in combination with on-going training. Apart from verbal language skills, proficiency in reading and writing, though helpful, are not as critical for running meetings or managing membership due to significant intra-group interaction within ethnic/linguistic communities as well as on-going in-person communication and interaction among board members.

SECTION III – ANALYSIS OF ASSETS, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES

In this section, we link the organizational structure of the Gila Farm Cooperative and the operational tasks involved in managing both the cooperative and CSA to a discussion focused on the assets, skills, attitudes and aspirations of member-farmers. More specifically, we rely on IRC documents, participatory observation and interviews with the GFC coordinator, IRC staff and GFC board members, to analyze the key challenges and opportunities in developing greater autonomy for the cooperative. This analysis is framed around a number of key themes that have emerged as critical both to the identity of the GFC as well as its future development prospects. These include:

- As a social enterprise, GFC seeks to combine both economic and social purpose
- GFC has adopted a cooperative form of organization and aspires to cultivate cooperative principles as defined by the International Cooperative Alliance.
- GFC is entering a developmental transition in which important decisions need to be made about both the relative balance between the autonomy of individual farmers vis-à-vis the cooperative as well as the capacity of the cooperative to develop independently of the IRC as its sponsoring agency.
- GFC brings together refugee farmers from distinctive ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities, thereby operating as a unique multicultural organization.

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19 Membership fee payment has not been strictly enforced and the procedure for collecting these payments as well as implementing membership bylaws within the Somali Bantu community has appeared to have generated some confusion. As a product of these, largely procedural issues, requests to board members to collect fees due at the beginning of March were still being made by the coordinator on the April 10th board meeting.
• As a cooperative social enterprise, education and training are key components of organizational development. Thus, facilitating greater “leading and learning” is of special interest in enabling the organization to move forward in meeting current and future challenges.

The analysis that follows tries to effectively correlate board member perceptions and skills with the themes listed above to show commonality, conflicts, and opportunities in moving forward toward a member owned and operated cooperative enterprise.

**Awareness and application of cooperative principles**

Related to a broader struggle to find a common vision, GFC members generally lack awareness of cooperative values and principles as related to their importance to the success of a cooperative endeavor. Common cooperative values (i.e. solidarity, equity, and self-responsibility) support a collective enterprise in its infancy, helping organizations such as GFC gain a solid foundation for long-term sustainability. Cooperative principles, such as member economic participation, democratic control, and concern for community, help cooperatives to stay true to the cooperative model by serving as guidelines for putting cooperative values into practice. They also give the organization a stronger identity, which establishes a value-added for stakeholders and consumers, distinctive from traditional for-profit businesses. Failing to embed cooperative principles can lead the enterprise to become more like a regular for-profit business with loss of member benefits and social mission (Cropp & Zeuli, 2004; Pestoff, 2012; Ward, 2005).

To what extent then, are cooperative principles applied within Gila Farm Cooperative?

Several cooperative principles are written into the cooperative’s articles and bylaws. *Voluntary and open membership* is established through the provision of open membership to any refugee with a demonstrated commitment to farming. The foundation for *Democratic member control* is provided through the granting of voting rights to members, the election of board members, and a specified commitment to democratic decision making procedures. *Member economic participation* is met by member fee requirements, rules on revenue distribution on sales, and benefit sharing. It is important however, that the principles are not only encoded in the cooperatives’ articles and bylaws, but also recognized and understood by members.

There is a wide range of views among stakeholders on the particular benefits of being a cooperative. An IRC staff member emphasized the sharing of risk and cost thereby allowing beginning farmers to overcome high upfront costs such as product liability insurance. The cooperative’s pro bono lawyer identified the distribution of income in proportion to member contribution as important. Both of these views relate to the principle of *member economic participation*, yet the range of views among members extended well beyond pragmatic economic self-interest. Some of the ideas expressed by board members about the cooperative included the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience; working together and helping each other; providing a structure for leadership and communication; and a means to give back the help they have received by helping new refugee farmers. Related to these themes, members expressed their willingness and capacity to build on ideas and beliefs that resonate with cooperative values. Because the application of principles within the organization relies both on attitudes and action, it is but also important to pair intention with what members actually do.

*Democratic member control* is evident from the participation of board members and how they see their role. Board members understand that they play a critical part in the decision making process of the organization and that the process is mean to be both deliberative and democratic. They are also well

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20 The International Cooperative Association defines cooperative values as self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. The seven cooperative principles include: Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Member Control; Member Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training and Information; Co-operation among Co-operatives; and Concern for Community. For a fuller description see, [http://2012.coop/en/what-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles](http://2012.coop/en/what-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles).
aware that they are elected representatives of the members of their district and are responsible for both taking member input to the board and reporting back to them from the board. Some board members also expressed an awareness of potential concerns regarding the composition of the board as related to the democratic process. For example, one board member suggested that the current imbalance of membership across cultural groups (the Somali-Bantu constitute by far the largest ethnic group and a clear majority of member farmers) presents the possibility of domination of the organization along cultural lines. While the current board structure, at least partially, prevents this from happening, most board members are aware of both the strengths and challenges of inclusive decision making processes.

Another cooperative principle that was expressed by GFC stakeholders was autonomy and independence. This was implicitly referenced by the cooperative's lawyer who mentioned his desire for members, "to develop some independence, to make decisions together and make this thing independent and self-sustaining". To a large extent, this is the central challenge currently facing GFC, which was widely acknowledged by all stakeholders, albeit for different reasons. For the most part, the emphasis on independence seemed to be driven primarily from the recognition of a perceived economic necessity rather than a desire on the part of the farmers to free the organization from external control and/or to deepen democratic participation.

Overall, the explicit value placed on cooperative principles as related to their role in both cooperative procedures and operations, is fairly weak. This is not surprising given stakeholders current preoccupation with the organizations’ short term survival. However, the risk is that in viewing cooperative principles as either largely formalistic and/or esoteric goals for the future, current opportunities to develop and deepen these principles will be lost, thus jeopardizing the long term viability of the CSA and/or the success of the cooperative enterprise more broadly.

The social enterprise: delivering social and economic value

In the organizational analysis we outlined a social enterprise model for the cooperative. The model raised some specific questions with implications for the strategic direction of the enterprise. Here, we examine member perceptions, skills, and aspirations through board members responses to questions related to their understanding of GFC in relation to their personal and collective goals, GFC’s relationship to the CSA and the IRC more broadly, and future strategies for development. More specifically, what are the members’ expectations for the delivery of economic value from the cooperative? Can the cooperative meet members' expectations for economic value delivery and how? What importance is placed by different stakeholders on maintaining the social value delivered to members and non-member refugees?

Board members were quite clear about the reason for starting Gila Farm Cooperative. The need to find consumers for their product came across as a central motivation for founding the cooperative. Selling at farmers' markets is very time consuming, limited in volume, and somewhat unstable. Due to a lack of the knowledge and time required to find and develop more reliable and larger markets, gardeners and farmers were frequently donating excess produce to food banks.21

Board members also demonstrated a good understanding of the CSA business model and were able to articulate numerous advantages and disadvantages it offers. The advantages indicated were mostly in comparison to farmers' markets and include: 1) Certainty of sales where customer volume and crop demand is known, 2) Financial stability from pre-paid orders, 3) Convenience of definitive location and time for exchange, 4) Potential for Growth to increase customer base.

Specific to expansion, the need to grow the cooperative CSA market and diversify into other markets was commonly recognized. At the time the research was undertaken there were 17 CSA subscribers, which,

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21 As one board member put it, "you can't imagine how much money we spent on these things and still we take all the things to the donation and the reason was we didn't have the knowledge and the time".
with a membership of 24 growers, is unlikely to support members’ expectations regarding the ability of the CSA to serve as a significant source of financial support. Board members all emphasized the importance of expanding the number of CSA consumers, as exemplified by the following comments: "when we have got a lot of crops in the future that's [20 – 30 customers] not enough to sell all the products" and "[we need the] CSA to grow more, like now is 17 [customers] but we want it to be more".

Board members also saw numerous benefits resulting from their belonging to the cooperative. In addition to marketing, a number of expressed benefits related to cooperative principles, such as mutual support and sharing ideas, as well as providing social value. They also demonstrated an understanding of the cooperative as a distinctive entity, and thus separate from the IRC. As one board member explained, IRC helps farmers to find land, obtain seed and water, to get them started but then there is a need to "move on" so that "new people can get help instead". The cooperative is clearly understood as a means to do just that, to move on and develop independence from IRC; however, it is also understood that the cooperative continues to be limited in what it can accomplish on its own and that the IRC provides critical auxiliary support, such as legal consultation and technical advising. Board members also expressed a good grasp of the components involved in the social enterprise model and the various flows of social, material and economic benefits between them. In addition to appreciating the social benefits accrued by GFC, board members appreciated the opportunity to become expert farmers and entrepreneurs, a trajectory they saw as feasible due to development training generated by the IRC.

The cooperative is also valued for the solidarity and mutual help it can provide to members, allowing them to become more independent of IRC, which ultimately, is the goal of refugee resettlement. This process of taking on new responsibilities was mentioned by the cooperative lawyer as a driving force behind the venture, a sentiment echoed by an IRC staff member who, in articulating how the cooperative could be successful stated, "a cooperative requires members to actually cooperate, that is why it is a cooperative in the first place...if we are working together I would say it is our own. There is a difference when we are working together... I am going to invest more time [than on my own]". In addition to building commitment, at least one cooperative board member expressed his desire to pass on the benefits of the training he received as a farmer in the New Roots program to new farmers, “IRC supported me a lot. Now I want to support the refugees because I learned how to do it, to be a good and successful farmer in AZ.”

While board members identified a variety of benefits derived from the cooperative and the operation of the CSA, they also identified a variety of challenges. One board member discussed how Price Points became a fixed value that eliminated negotiation of price with the customer or flexibility with other market niches. Other stakeholders expressed concerns over inconsistency in CSA sales and lack of mutual agreement among board members as to whether CSA sales can serve as the primary Income Generation for financial support of its members. Another challenge of the CSA business model for GFC is in Meeting Crop Production; while board members understood the potential of the CSA to grow and create additional markets; board members recognize that it is currently difficult “to provide CSA with produce regularly.” While members are well aware that expanding membership can help to ensure demand is met, assuming equitable opportunity of members to produce for the CSA, it can limit the returns available to each individual farmer. This need to balance customers’ needs with refugee farmers concerns over membership is recognized by the IRC coordinator, and appears also to be understood by board members, although not an explicit topic of discussion. Ideas about expanding the cooperative’s business are not limited to the CSA. Board members expressed a variety of other market possibilities for the cooperative to develop including direct sales to stores, opening their own retail outlet, and wholesale to out-of-state distributors. IRC staff has also been investigating possibilities of the local restaurant market for direct or indirect purveyor, sales. Though there are many ideas in the mix, there is no consensus as to which of these strategies to pursue. An exploratory study to gauge interest among local restaurants in the downtown Phoenix area was undertaken by SEAZ student researchers in Spring, 2012 (see http://socialeconomyaz.org/asu-course/urban-agriculture-projects/). However, feasibility studies
have not been undertaken to assess the potential advantages of these diverse strategies to GFC in particular.

Related to development planning more generally, the above analysis shows agreement on the overall purpose of the enterprise (to deliver social and economic value), coupled with a lack of specific, and explicitly stated strategies to accomplish key development goals. Cropp and Zeuli (2004) expresses the significance of a mission and clearly identified development goals to "clarify the purpose of the business" and "serve as a compass for cooperative organization and operation" (70). The importance of such high level, long term, planning is emphasized by Cropp and Zeuli (2004) as helping:

The cooperative avoid ‘institutional drift,’ a condition where a business has failed to identify clear goals or a plan for achieving them. Successful planning focuses on what the cooperative wants to achieve; how it proposes to achieve its goals; and why it wants to pursue these goals (74).

The cooperative has an opportunity to strengthen its progress by providing short and medium term planning to set operational targets over the next two to five years that align with long term strategic goals for the enterprise. Without them, board members are limited in organizing production where all farmers are contributing to crop yield and CSA demand. Specific development goals coupled with operational targets would help identify what markets to pursue, project annual budgets, and yearly revenue, customer, and membership targets, as well as provide a clearer sense of the amount of resources and level of activity needed to sustain an acceptable level of growth. This type of medium-term planning establishes parameters for more detailed production and staff planning, both of which are critical to insure sustainability over time.

**Individual and group goals versus institutional aspirations**

Related to member priorities, not all board members view cooperative management as primary, citing the time constraint of farmers in terms of running a CSA. While the intermediate and advanced competencies noted in Section II are important for maintain and improving operations of both the CSA and cooperative, other priorities are at the forefront of board members’ priorities, specifically becoming a better farmer. As expressed by one board member, “it is not easy to be farmer,” especially in Arizona.

Member opinions diverge considerably in relation to centrality of farming in enabling refugees to succeed in Arizona. At the extremes, members expressed both passion and disillusionment with farming. One member’s passionate response highlights refugee optimism regarding a future in farming, “Farming is interesting. There is always something to do. You are never annoyed when you are focused on something interesting – really passionate”. Others have significant reservations, expressing hesitation, disappointment and sadness, much of which stems from a chemical incident that adversely affected an earlier harvest. For these people, farming continues to represent hardship. “…we still struggle with the problems that face us now, among the problem is the chemical on our farm and we spend up to $35,000 on the farm at that time”. The affected farmers worry about the recurrence of such an incident, coupled with a multi-year lease signed with the landowner. They don’t know where or how else to get land: “Now they just plant because of the lease they signed”, unsure as to where else to go or how else to get land.

In spite of the problems facing refugee farmers in Arizona, board members expressed confidence in their ability to take on increased responsibility for the operation and management of Cooperatives’ business relations. They appreciate the degree to which GFC’s operation currently depend on the coordinator, but also expressed the belief that many of the roles and responsibilities of the coordinator could be assumed either by someone "found among us,” "when somebody teaches us what to do what we can do ourselves," or, "brought in from outside."
In order for GFC to develop into a successful cooperative enterprise, reliance on external assistance must be reduced; however, eliminating external support appears both unrealistic and undesirable for a number of reasons. For the moment, external support creates credibility, access to supportive partnerships, and additional networks, which are critical both for sustaining current operations as well as fostering growth. Apart from the participation of refugees, broader participation of interested customers, business leaders, and volunteers, helps raise awareness, strengthens trust and collaboration, and builds capacity. In addition, external support from IRC in the form of office facilities and material support are critical for operations given the limited financial resources available to refugee farmers (i.e., in availability of commercial loans and independent access to grants).

Thus, one of the biggest challenges currently facing Gila Farm Cooperative is replacing grant-funded staff. Assuming that grants to fund staff cannot be obtained indefinitely, the core solution to the staffing requirements of the cooperative lies somewhere between total reliance on paid employees to being totally staffed by members. It is possible that unpaid assistance, for example pro-bono professional services, student internships and volunteer staff can provide hybrid solutions, although over-reliance on such support presents its own problems (Thompson, 2008, p.157).

Defining Leadership Roles

The leadership provided to GCF by the IRC coordinator is in many respects akin to the role that would be assumed by a cooperative CEO. In addition to performing key CSA operations and administrative tasks, the IRC coordinator provides strategic leadership to the board. As underscored by Cropp and Zeuli (2004), the difference between these roles is one of management on the one hand, and direction and oversight on the other. While board members were not particularly concerned about their dependence on the IRC for facilities support, one member stating, "it is not like IRC is going [away] so even if [coordinator] is gone … we can still have our meetings," most board members acknowledged their reliance on the IRC coordinator for cooperative administration as an unsustainable long term arrangement. As one board member put it, "[The coordinator] is supporting us right now, but in the future someone has to adopt this process because [the coordinator] will not continue … we have to depend on ourselves".

With the knowledge that the IRC coordinator position will only be funded for an additional year (information made available to members during the course of the research), it is important to understand the challenges and opportunities this loss of leadership and responsibility will entail for the CSA and the cooperative as a whole.

Assuming that the current coordinator leaves the position next year, one possibility is that the IRC coordinator role—a role which incorporates a variety of advanced tasks, as underscored in Section II of the report—is filled by another paid staff member. Because of the knowledge accumulated by the current coordinator and the respect she has garnered from the farmers, there would be a considerable learning curve for both farmer members and staff member, even if this person were to be recruited from within the IRC. Assuming funding could be generated to pay this person, which in fact may not be possible, this person would likely need to possess not only suitable expertise in CSAs and small business management, but also a unique set of interpersonal skills to facilitate a successful relationship with the GFC’s unique multi-cultural board. As emphasized by Cropp and Zeuli (2004: 53), the separation of responsibilities provided by a non-member as cooperative CEO can be preferable given a strong board to provide leadership and accountability.

In the case of GFC, it is not evident that such board-driven leadership has emerged. Though there are signs that board members are starting to assume more responsibilities, for example, the president schedules board meetings and takes minutes, the agenda and management of the meetings continue to be driven by the coordinator. While there are a variety of potential reasons for this, not least of which has to
do with the profile of board members as recently resettled refugees who have limited experience with American culture, let alone business practices. However, it is also true that the competency and skill of the current IRC coordinator has made developing leadership skills less of a priority than it would otherwise have been. Another issue at play is that leadership takes on different connotation to different members based on cultural difference such as described by Fonteneau et al (2010):

In some countries or under specific periods, social and solidarity organization are not automatically associated with the concept of voluntary membership or collective action because these types of organizations have been used by governments or colonial authorities to organize the population in a compulsory way for production or political purposes (p. 8).

Thus, leadership may be associated with steering. Consequently, there may be a reluctance to develop initiative in light of past persecution combined with the desire to find common ground among participants who are very different apart from their common status as refugee farmers. This concern is hinted at in the following board member comment, “I would like to …discuss and give ideas – not to lead forcibly”.

Leadership however, is not “intrinsically antithetical to the collective dimension of an organization” (Fonteneau et al., 2010, p. 8) provided that democratic checks and balances are in place and board members are vigilant in guarding against authoritarian rule. Board members’ diverse backgrounds combined with the solidarity generated by their shared experience in resettlement, suggest that the vision and drive that established them as board members can parlay into a stronger leadership role with the accumulation of experience.

Creating unity within multicultural and multiethnic norms

Both within GFC and CSA, there are layers of cultural norms and expectations that guide interactions both among and between IRC staff and refugee farmers. These different codes, norms, and unspoken rules can lead to confusion, misunderstanding and/or conflict, influencing participants’ behaviors and interpretations, as well as the level of trust and commitment they put into GFC a collective endeavor.

Among the layers of culture with a high probability of conflicting norms include: 1) Individual culture – influenced by personal values and beliefs, 2) Ethnic and national culture – dependent on country, origin, rituals, and/or traditions 3) Board Member culture – Roberts Rules of Order, motioning for progress or decision, 4) Cooperative culture – Principles of Cooperative Culture, 5) Business culture – results-oriented, contracts, transactions and exchange, and 6) Non-profit culture – prioritizing the social, collective, and common good. 22

The degree to which these cross-cutting cultural norms impact different stakeholders within GFC is subject to debate. However, it is important to highlight what makes GFC relatively unique: the centrality of ethno-linguistic differences in the context of a conscious effort to create a cooperative culture in Arizona, a state strongly committed to individualism. GFC’s incorporation of four distinctive ethno-linguistic communities, each having strong cultural identities rooted in different countries of origin, demonstrates a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion. Yet, it also highlights distinctive challenges in maintaining these elements over time, among them the challenge of fostering and reinforcing solidarity and cohesion. As emphasized by Carbaugh, 1990: 152), “coordinating conduct is a fundamental, practical problem even if diversity is a goal,” (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 152).

22 http://www.robertsrules.org/motions.htm
Undoubtedly the multiple perspectives, ideas and intentions emanating from such a diverse array of stakeholders complicates’ more mundane business and operational challenges, let alone those imposed by the development of a cooperative enterprise. For example, implementing the principle of democratic member control meets some difficulties because of the particular structure of the cooperative, based on cultural and language "districts." When creating the GFC board, the reasoning in structuring board representation by language groups was due to the need to communicate cooperative business information out to the various member groups. In this sense, language is considered a skill. Yet for some, language is not only a skill but an identity: “Communication is motivated at least in part – on the basis of cultural patterns; norms, forms, and modes of communication patterns are a performance of and voice to cultural identity” (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 151-152).

Additionally, the diverse cultural composition of members generates disparities in the representation of members on the board as well as differences in understanding among members more generally. Related to a collective board, one board member expressed difficulty in coming to terms with “finding a common decision, one conclusion – to agree,” given the considerable diversity of board composition. Though acculturation to and skill acquisition regarding formal organizational protocol presents significant challenges, board members appear to have made significant progress in learning appropriate protocol to engage in meaningful discussion and decision-making, particularly in relation to board member culture and exercising the Roberts Rules of Order. An example of this is provided by the deliberative process witnessed in the cooperatives’ April board meeting whereby board members discussed and subsequently came to a decision to ban producers who fail to meet their order commitments, thus demonstrating not only operational efficacy, a key element of successful board meetings, but also the ability to engage difficult questions relating to equity and fairness.

For many of the members, business in the U.S. is far more complex than business conducted in their native countries. This is expressed by one board members comment that, “Back home … you just take [things from the farm] straight to the market. Here …some group is bringing stuff from the farm and some other group over here … takes the stuff to the market and every place and goes around the city”. With experience they are becoming increasingly aware of the cultural shifts they will have to make to adjust to how “American” business is done in Arizona. Expressing this process of acclimation, one member offered the following: “understanding how American business works, for example, you have to respect the person you are leasing the land from. You can’t just show up at farmers market and just set up your tent, you have to check with the market manager first.” Another member observed that, "the difference between here and Africa is that in Africa when somebody buys something and he is missing a shilling he is let go but here nobody lets you go even for one cent…we will have to understand that difference in culture". This member highlights that cost equals cost, price equals price, and so there is no room for negotiation, subjectivity, or trust in getting paid back the missing shilling. This, learned “cultural competency,” then is not only about technical issues related to “how to do sales,” and other areas of business related, for example to leasing and vending, but broader inter-personal relations as well.

**Education and Training**

Education and Training are key components of the cooperative model. In order to contribute effectively to the development of the cooperative, members, managers and employees have to be educated and trained in various aspects related to the operation, management and governance of the cooperative. While not every member receives the same training, the expectation is that members acquire a base of knowledge to understand their respective role within the cooperative and from which to acquire more specialized skills.

Generating a better understanding of the skills required to run the cooperative and CSA and the expectations and competencies of cooperative board members is of particular concern to IRC staff. In
light of the impending expiration of external funding which currently supports the coordinator position, a key area of interest is in exploring options for transferring increased management, operations and administration responsibilities to members of the governing board.\textsuperscript{23}

Focusing on general skills, attitudes and aspirations extracted from interviews with board member and supplemented with IRC documents and IRC staff interviews, reveals varying degrees of knowledge of, and experience in, U.S. business practices. All board members expressed a willingness to take on increased responsibilities, but most expressed both a need and desire to first learn more about them. Thus, information and further education are viewed as important prerequisites to jumping into business and leadership roles within the cooperative. Below is one board member’s view of the significance of the latter.

Education is important. Everybody knows and understands that education is important and that they want to take part in education. And nobody wants to go backwards. Everybody wants to go further and do things. We are interested in everything that gives us knowledge and things like that.

Education needs are vast, however, and there is a significant distinction to be made in the need for training regarding basic vs. more advanced skills, technical vs. cultural skills, and business vs. administrative skills. Though there appear to be a significant array of skills sets represented on the board, focused skill development and “on-the-job training offer the prospect of significantly improving board members capacity to develop the intermediary and advanced tasks identified as critical to many of the CSA and GFC administrative functions discussed in Section II.

Related to previous work experience – which in turn informs members’ skill sets as related to basic, intermediate and advanced tasks – board members have had a broad array of experiences, in farming as well as a variety of service sectors, as well as diverse educational backgrounds. Some board members expressed great pride in their farming experience, describing it as more than a job but rather a profession deeply connected to their cultural heritage. “I am a farmer by heritage, I got it from my dad and grandfather. For 30 years I was operating the machine that used to do farm work”. Others had fairly limited farming experience. Based on the USDA definition of a beginning farmer—according to Ahearn (2009:3), operating a farm for ten years or less—most GFC board members are beginning farmers. Thus, it is not surprising that the employment experience of the board included business, house cleaning, janitorial work, baking, vocational high school teaching, social work, and training students in welding, grinding, and machinery. Though not many board members have formal education beyond high school, of those who do, one has been trained at a technology institute in mechanics; one has the United States equivalent of a Master’s degree; and, another has completed military training.

Board members also have diverse backgrounds in terms of the level and intensity of previous training and familiarity with what we have termed intermediary and advanced tasks. While most board members are not familiar with formal record keeping or advanced tasks requiring computer competency, some board members recognized the importance of these skills, though other skills related to farming, production and running a CSA seemed to garner the most interest.

While members are open and interested in learning, overall, members’ comments reveal that they are largely unfamiliar with leading in this context. Thus, they face a relatively steep learning curve not only in regard to acquiring advanced competencies in governance and the technical aspects of business, but

\textsuperscript{23}Though an important component of this study, it is important to note that an assessment of board member skills was not undertaken due to time constraints, as well as a variety of other factors. Only limited information was gathered on this subject from interviews, and since observations of board members took place primarily during trainings and board meetings, such observations did not sufficiently provide enough evidence of actual business, organizational or other work skills of the group.
also in terms of cultural understanding in America and American business culture, a necessity for most intermediary tasks as well. Furthermore, most board members affirmed the importance of training not just for board members but all stakeholders involved in supporting, interacting and promoting the cooperative.

As a sponsoring organization specializing in refugee resettlement, IRC has done a great deal to provide refugees with education and training, in particular job training, English training, and computer training. However, this has largely occurred parallel to the activities of GFC. These trainings have not been integrated into the cooperative, either as a targeted form of support for cooperative members or board members more specifically. Training has focused primarily on farming in the context of the New Roots program. More specifically training to farmers has included: Marketing (Crops) 101; How to Harvest; Risk Management in Agribusiness; and Getting seeds, acquiring land. Additional trainings and/or access to resources have come from funding by the Office of Refugee Resettlement Microenterprise Development (ORR MED) Program Grants. Related to education and training, allowable activities funded by these programs include: Pre-loan Technical Assistance through one-on-one business consultation, short-term training, which can include business plan preparation and access to business credit; Post-loan Technical Assistance; and, capital for start-up of new business (ORR, 2012: 3). This grant also stipulates that projects “should be designed in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for the refugee population” (ORR, 2012: 2).

It is evident that IRC prioritizes trainings that are appropriate and related to the refugees. As underscored by Hugh Joseph (2012), a consultant to GFC vis-à-vis the New Roots program, continued infrastructure building is crucial to success (Joseph, 2012). Since many GFC members are new to farming and want to make this endeavor successful and beneficial for them, Joseph (2012) strongly recommends that sponsoring agencies outside the farming sector forge closer connections with agriculture communities. Joseph’s recommendation can be applied to opportunities to connect to regional and national networks with agricultural expertise in areas where this is not already being done. In areas related to training beginning farmers, National Farmers Union Beginning Farmers Institute Training and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association for PEPA (Programa Educativo para Pequeños Agricultores) have already established curricula regarding how to train beginning farmers. For GFC specifically, members have expressed interest in mentorship from expert farmers, shadowing others in farming processes, and hands-on training in order to experience the role and functions of running a farm or operating a business. This is exemplified in the following statement from a board member: “I think we have to do and get some trained farmers who can allow us to go to visit them and learn about it. Share, what they have to teach us.” As indicated in Section II above, some on-site guidance is already being done by IRC staff related to crop protection, bunching, weighing and bagging produce, and a variety of technical assistance (i.e. addressing pests and lease negotiation). Integrating this existing training, with additional support services offered outside of IRC is likely to have a significantly positive effect both in advancing learning among GFC’s multi-cultural membership base as well as extending resource networks for refugee farming communities.

Along these lines, it is important to consider not only the question of how to train refugee farmers but also why to do so. The explicit purpose offered by the IRC is to help refugees rebuild their life in a new country after fleeing or being dislocated from their native homeland. But there are competing, and at times conflicting demands placed on refugee farmers, especially as members of GFC. IRC advocates for GFC members to be trained in cooperative and CSA functions to promote greater self-sufficiency and ultimately the successful development of a member-run, member-controlled organization. Yet many GFC

26 See http://www.rescue.org/our-work
members seek to be trained not to run a business with others but to become better farmers so that they can own and operate a farm on their own or in conjunction with friends and family members. As underscored by Hugh Joseph. If the goal is in creating a viable economic enterprise, “… the goal is to create farm owners not farm workers” (Joseph, 2012). Other refugee farms/gardeners, however, do not see their future in farming at all, but seek training for earned income to supplement their livelihood by selling produce. The diversity of refugee farmer interests and goals beyond those of cooperative board, becomes a key factor in developing a better appreciation of the complexity of factors that need to be considered in future stages of development

SECTION IV - CONCLUSION

In this final section of the report, we draw on our previous analyses in Sections I-III to make recommendations regarding steps that can be taken to move Gila Farm Cooperative towards a more independent and sustainable future that meets the economic and social goals of its key stakeholders.

Before discussing the recommendations in detail some relevant limitations and strengths of the research approach are first acknowledged. First, though a wide variety of data was collected during the course of the research, the sources from which they were collected are fairly limited. Given the relatively short time frame of the project, we were not able to include a representative sample of cooperative members in the study. As a result, our data does not provide a full picture of cooperative members’ perspectives, nor is it meant to. Based on researcher expertise combined with pragmatic limitations imposed by time and resource constraints, we have adopted an exploratory approach to our case study, focused on key stakeholders, identified by their importance in the management and operational structure of the cooperative. By focusing our interviews and observations on board members and IRC support staff we include refugee farmers that have the most knowledge of and experience with the cooperative, and are therefore limited in our capacity to draw insight from the experiences and perspectives of “rank and file” members, refugee farmers who declined to join the cooperative, as well as New Roots gardeners who also make a significant contribution to the operation of the CSA. Furthermore, though considerable effort was made to insure the validity and reliability of the data collected, the different educational and cultural backgrounds of the researchers vis-à-vis the refugee farmers, limited time to build rapport with interview subjects, and the necessity of translators are likely to have impacted the interview process in ways that cannot easily be predicted, and thus properly accounted for.

Despite the limitations, efforts to triangulate on data sources and methods, the on-going nature of SEAZ’s partnership with IRC (initially established in 2010), and the comprehensive approach taken to understand the challenges and opportunities facing the GFC from multiple perspectives, provides considerable confidence in the validity of the research results. These factors, together with our systematic approach to data collection and analysis, allow us to offer a theoretically informed, yet highly contextualized set of recommendations for the future development of the cooperative. While our short, medium and long term recommendations are interlinked in an effort to provide a coherent plan for promoting the long term viability of the GFC as a cooperative enterprise, we recognize that there are multiple paths available to becoming a successful business enterprise.

Our recommendations emerge from a two part analysis. The first part focuses on GFC’s current structure and operation, placing it within its wider context. It identifies stakeholders, flows of economic and social value, and classifies functional processes and tasks as well as what it takes to perform them. This organizational analysis forms a baseline for what is needed to operate GFC as a viable social enterprise. The second part considers the current perspectives and skills as well as future aspirations of key IRC staff and GFC board members. It explores internal differences as well as the fit between the roles and responsibilities highlighted in part one and the perspectives and skills articulated in part two. The
recommendations that follow lean toward strengthening economic participation and strategic planning around core organizational goals. Focusing on these areas in the short and medium term will allow for expanding social value and benefits to cooperative members over the longer term.

Recommendations

Short Term

Short term recommendations are those that need to be implemented over the next one to two years, primarily because they address urgent needs. The first recommendation, developing internal staffing capability, is already widely accepted by key stakeholders and therefore provides a good point of departure.

- Develop internal staffing capability and long term staffing solution.

Uncertainty over the continued provision of external funding to support cooperative staffing, coupled with extreme reliance on the IRC coordinator to undertake a wide range of tasks, puts GFC at high risk of operational disruption. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop alternative staffing as a contingency and, over the longer term, as a more sustainable way of organizing staffing.

The first part of this recommendation involves creating several cooperative staff positions to be filled by cooperative board members over the next six to twelve months on a part time basis. We recommend that the coordinator work with board members to define the roles and responsibilities of the positions and find members willing and able to fill the positions. After helping to train the members to perform the required tasks, the coordinator could then gradually hand over responsibility for the positions to the members. In undertaking this process:

- Positions should be matched to member skills and capacity required to perform the tasks. Referring back to the task ratings developed in section II, basic level tasks could be transitioned quite easily and quickly, but these are very few. Intermediate tasks, which are typically more specialized or require higher levels of general competencies, will require more training and time, and the number of members potentially capable of performing these tasks will be fewer. Advanced tasks, requiring greater integrated knowledge across the business, specialized skills and high levels of general competencies will require a lot of training and there will be few members with the potential to fill these roles, which makes it all the more important to begin identifying and recruiting potential candidates as soon as possible.

- Each position should be shared among a small group of members (e.g. two – three) so as to provide cover and reduce the demand on any one individual's time without diluting the experience needed to develop competence and responsibility.

- Ideally, training would work best through a hands-on "shadowing" process, which would allow members to learn tasks by doing, thus building confidence as well as competence.

- Members who take on staffing positions should compensated in some way for their time and expense, through for example, reduced membership fees or reduced cooperative commission on sales.

This recommendation requires a major commitment from both IRC staff and cooperative members to put time and effort into training over a period of 6 to 12 months. Instead of expecting a relatively quick or complete hand over of operational responsibility from the current coordinator to the membership, outcomes aimed for should be to increase internal staffing capability and reduce the risk of disruption due to staff problems; to increase member knowledge of the cooperative; and to learn about what the membership can or cannot take on.
The second part of the recommendation is to develop a long term, sustainable staffing plan. The evaluation of outcomes of the first part of the recommendation will be important in designing the long term plan, as will other recommendations, in particular the business development plan. The situation regarding funding for the current IRC provided coordinator position will serve as critical input into the long term solution. Positive experiences from internal staff development may encourage members to play a significant part in the long term plan. Negative experiences, on the other hand, may steer the plan toward an external, paid staff solution.

- **Develop a one-year business plan.**
  
  In the absence of specific operational targets for the cooperative and the time and focus needed to craft a viable medium term development plan, current operations have no specific objectives or direction. This leaves the organization in limbo at precisely the time when forward momentum is needed for longer term planning. It is therefore recommended that a "stop-gap" plan be developed for what the cooperative hopes to achieve over the next year and how it will do so. Having such a plan will help to focus efforts in a positive direction and provide targets to aim for, regarding in particular the identified need to grow the business. Starting from where they would like to be in one year, members can use a back casting approach to estimate would need to be taken in the short term to achieve desired performance goals. Aside from giving direction to current operations this would also be a useful learning exercise towards producing a full business plan. This recommendation involves a commitment primarily from the cooperative board and the coordinator to first develop the plan and then to implement it.

**Medium – Long Term**

The following recommendations are intended to be implemented in the medium to long term (two years or more) and address issues that are less of a threat to immediate survival as they are to long term sustainability and success.

- **Define the social enterprise model.**
  
  Without clarity on what is envisioned for the organization and the long term goals it is aiming for there is no guiding framework for strategic planning to take place. This puts the organization at risk of "institutional drift", under-performance, and ultimately, failure. There is therefore a need to define the cooperative's guiding vision and long term goals. Because this involves bringing board members up to speed by providing them reliable data and information, as well as a considerable investment of time on the part of board members, it easy to delay an exercise that is often perceived as having little short term benefit. However, as underscored above, the failure to engage members in organizational "visioning" as well as debate and dialog about expectations’ as related to external constraints and opportunities, hinders development on a variety of other fronts. Thus, it is recommended that efforts to define the identity of GFC proceed in terms similar to those presented in the organizational analysis. In other words, by creating common consensus related to basic questions. What is the overall purpose of the enterprise? Who are considered the key stakeholders? And what are the social and economic value flows? Answering questions like these means that everyone understands what they are working towards, what is expected of them, and what they can expect in return, thereby minimizing uncertainty about key members’ perspectives regarding issues critical to the future of the enterprise such as, will IRC continue to allow the cooperative to use its business facilities, and if so, under what conditions? It also provides a starting point for framing the parameters of the medium term development plan.
This recommendation would primarily be driven by the cooperative board and coordinator but would also require involvement of cooperative members, IRC New Roots staff and IRC management. It is also a prerequisite for the next recommendation: *Create a three to five year development plan.*

- **Create a three to five year development plan.**

  To work towards long term goals, business operations need to be planned in advance to coordinate resources and activities and to be able to gauge whether expected progress is being made or not. Without such planning there is a risk of disruption to the development of the enterprise due to being reactive rather than proactive and veering off course from long term goals. With such planning effort is concentrated in matching objectives to strategic action and maximizing derived benefits for key stakeholders. Currently this is not being done.

  There is therefore a need to create a development plan, setting yearly objectives and parameters over the next three to five years. The plan should identify the resources and production needed to achieve yearly sales target and budgets while focusing on keeping the enterprise on a trajectory towards long term goals. Creating the plan will require tough decisions related for example to whether to hire paid staff, make capital investments, or develop new markets. These types of decisions will thus dictate actions that need to be taken to regular business operations as well. Performance against the plan should be regularly monitored and actions modified to stay on track.

  This recommendation would primarily be driven by the cooperative board and coordinator as well as other IRC staff such as the Economic Development Program Manager, who can provide consultation and support in its development. Examples and resources from other organizations, such as World Peas and SEAZ, may also be helpful as well. Developing the plan depends on long term goals and parameters as provided by the prior recommendation to define the social enterprise model. Developing an initial plan should take place over the next twelve months. The next recommendation, *Develop production planning capabilities,* is a critical operational task that will affect the ability to meet objectives defined in the development plan.

- **Develop production planning capabilities.**

  It is important that CSA production is able to meet the cooperative's commitment to supply customers while at the same time meeting members' economic needs and continuing to provide social value. Yet currently there is little coordination between supply and demand with negative implications for business growth, member farming operations, and cooperative membership. There is therefore an urgent need for greater integration between the two sides of the enterprise.

  It is recommended that the cooperative develop capabilities for more effective coordination of crop production with market demand. Expertise, tools, and operational procedures should all be a part of an ongoing development process in which, eventually, production planning should become an integral part of cooperative operations. This recommendation would primarily be driven by the cooperative board and coordinator but would probably require additional assistance from someone with appropriate technical skills. Implementation should begin as soon as possible as it will take substantial time to develop effective capabilities but also because lack of coordination is a constraint on the cooperative's ability to sustain as well as grow its market.

- **Embed cooperative principles in the organization.**

  Cooperatives that pay too little attention to cooperative principles are at risk of becoming more like a regular for-profit business with resulting loss of member benefits. While there is evidence of good cooperative practice taking place the analysis suggests more needs to be done to cultivate solidarity and mutual trust over time. There is therefore a need to increase awareness and understanding of cooperative principles among the membership and their roles and responsibilities in applying the principles.
It is recommended that a cooperative embedding program be developed and implemented. This should consist of several components such as the following suggestions:

- General cooperative training for new members and annual training for existing members.
- Greater involvement with the local and national cooperative movement (i.e. the Arizona Cooperative Initiative and the National Cooperative Business Association).
- Invite guest speakers to give presentations and workshops for cooperative members on relevant aspects of cooperative development (i.e. board development, fostering member participation, and promoting inter-cultural solidarity).
- As part of annual cooperative reporting, make it a requirement to report on how the cooperative applied the seven cooperative principles (or why they may not be relevant) and identify where improvement is needed.
- As part of the development plan annual update, set specific objectives for the application of cooperative principles.
- Establish regular social events that allow cooperative members to get to know one another on a more personal basis. Informal gatherings such as potluck picnics and field trips are important for facilitating conversation about issues other than farming, so too are more formal events such as dances and birthday parties which allow members to experience and appreciate each other’s cultures.

This recommendation would be driven by the board members and the coordinator. It should be incrementally implemented beginning in the next twelve months.

- **Design an Education & Training Plan.**

  Our analysis identified a number of gaps between the skills and knowledge currently possessed by members and those that would be advantageous to the cooperative if developed by members in the future. Currently, the cooperative provides very limited training in areas not directly related to farming. There is therefore a need to provide member education and training relevant to the needs of the cooperative.

  An education and training program for members would help match the unique skills and knowledge requirements of the cooperative to members’ skills, previous experience, and current level of involvement with the cooperative. The education and training program should complement existing training available to refugees such as IRC New Roots farmer training and micro-enterprise development training. In addition to involving GFC members in defining what education and training should be included, the plan should specify how it will be delivered, who will deliver it, and materials to go with it. IRC staff working with external consultants and cooperative board members could develop a grant proposal to help fund the development of such a program. The following “short course” proposals provide an idea of the kind of curriculum that could be included:

  - **The Gila Farm Cooperative** – a basic introduction to the cooperative and how it works. This would be delivered in person to all new members. It would also be available in handbook form.
  
  - **Cooperative principles, roles & responsibilities** – a basic introduction to cooperatives, emphasizing principles and the role of members in applying them. This would be delivered in person to all new members upon joining as well as all existing members on an annual basis. It would also be provided in handbook form. Existing resources may already be available for developing this component of the curriculum.
- **Operations** - a handbook or series of handbooks providing guidance on specific operational tasks. This would be a training and reference resource for use by members performing specific operational roles. Training to perform these roles should be given as shadow training to members as needed.

While education and training is important it is difficult to deliver effectively. Developing curricula, lessons, and materials, training trainers, and administering the training, is time consuming and costly, and it is difficult to evaluate its value. As such, the recommendation for education and training made here is minimal. What formal training that is recommended should be general and aimed at new members and refreshing existing members.

The main commitment to this recommendation is by the cooperative board and coordinator in consultation with external consultants as well as the input of cooperative members more broadly.

- **Develop links with communities of interest.**

  Isolated organizations limit their learning capacity and opportunities for support and further development, and ultimately their capability for innovation. As a result, they can become at risk of stagnation, loss of competitiveness, and ultimately failure. IRC has shown great initiative in developing links with external organizations and programs. Beyond forging links with federal agencies, it has fostered external partnerships through its New Roots program, as well as local university programs (e.g. SEAZ), and local organizations linked to the alternative agricultural community.

  We recommend that it continue to work to cultivate and expand these linkages. Through these networks, GFC could foster relationships and develop partnerships to cultivate a broader base of volunteers and expertise to accomplish specific medium to long term projects (for example designing and implementing an education training program and expanding CSA membership). The ASU / Social Enterprise Arizona project bringing ASU students together with GFC and Roosevelt Row CDC ([www.rooseveltrow.org](http://www.rooseveltrow.org)) to explore possibilities in building links with local restaurants is a good example. Additional efforts could be made in forging linkages between GFC and the Arizona Cooperative Initiative ([www.azcoop.net](http://www.azcoop.net)) which exists “for the purpose of creating, promoting and supporting Arizona cooperatives”. A further direction for building relationships is with peer organizations in other localities such as World Peas ([World Peas, n.d.](http://www.worldpeas.org)) and Local Harvest ([Perry & Franzblau, 2010](http://www.localharvest.org)). Getting involved can have direct benefits in the form of practical help and opportunities and also helps contribute to these movements in general.

  This recommendation should be driven by the board and the coordinator but also include IRC staff and external partners.

**Final Remarks**

Moving into its second year of operations, Gila Farm Cooperative is at a critical point in its development. It must now transition from a newly established enterprise to a stable organization that meets the needs of its primary stakeholders. The decisions and associated actions that take place over the next one to two years will be important in setting the trajectory that the cooperative will take and that, to some extent, will determine the organization’s long term outcomes. In this report, we draw on extensive research over the course of spring, 2012, to provide an early, yet comprehensive analysis of the cooperative's current state of development, utilizing insights gained to offer recommendations intended to steer GFC towards a successful future. We do not however, attempt to define what success means, other than operational sustainability that meets stakeholder needs. We feel it is critical for the organizations’ stakeholders, particularly its farmer members, to develop an understanding of what success means both for the organization as well as the specific refugee communities they represent. The overriding priority of the
recommended actions is to strengthen the core mission of the enterprise as a cooperative enterprise that provides opportunities for the economic advancement of its members. Some of the recommendations are within the existing capabilities of the cooperative to enact. For others, the capability exists within IRC and may also require additional external help (e.g. developing production planning capacity). Though the road ahead promises to be challenging, the determination, commitment and solidarity we witnessed within the cooperative, combined with IRC’s commitment to success, are major strengths that will help overcome many of the difficulties that lie ahead.

REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A – Methodology

• Qualitative Case Study

Research Project

• Purpose: 1) Employ a social enterprise framework to analyze the structure and organizational processes that form the basis of Gila Farm Cooperative and its relationship to IRC. 2) Articulate the current model of development pursued by GFC based on a descriptive analysis of key stakeholder responsibilities, capacities and perspectives 3) Offer preliminary recommendations for fostering a cooperative model of development via supportive actions in transferring greater operational responsibilities from IRC staff to GFC members

Research Questions

• How can the operation and management of the Gila Farm Cooperative be developed to include a greater role for cooperative members?
• What are the educational skills, needs and strategies that would benefit the cooperative members and board member roles in assuming responsibility for operations?
• What key factors influence the viability and sustainability of transitioning and operating a cooperative?

Research Sample

• Five board members representative of refugee farmer members
• Two non-profit staff directly and indirectly contributing roles or resources to the cooperative
• One pro-bono lawyer involved in the creation and legal processes of the cooperative

Data Collection

• Data Type: Digital audio recordings, pictures, organizational documents
• Methods: Observation, Semi-structured and unstructured interview questions, note-taking

Data Analysis

• Transcription of interviews
• Interpretation of text, document analysis
• Categorization of text and patterns for thematic organization

Data Presentation

• Case Study and Summary Report
• Presentation to non-profit
• Presentation at college
Appendix B – Gila Farm Cooperative Historical Timeline

2007
IRC begins working with refugee farmers through the New Roots Farm and Food Security Program

Winter 2011
District and community representatives selected to discuss formation of a cooperative

Spring 2011
Perkins Coie LLP agrees to be legal representative to GFC. SEAZ partnership established to begin working with IRC coordinator and farmers to develop support material and ideas and resources for enhancing promotion of the cooperative

Summer 2011
Gila Board Cooperative board member elections
Begin collection of membership dues

Sept 2011
Drafting Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws

Fall 2011
Filing of the Articles of Incorporation with the state

Oct 2011
Gila Board Cooperative board meetings begin

Dec 2011
Substantial set back in production goals due to crop spraying incident

Jan 2012
First CSA Customer Pick Up

Spring 2012
SEAZ research team undertakes observations, interviews and additional research

Mar 2012
Agribusiness Risk Management Training Part 1 & 2

May 2012
Crop Harvest from GFC Farmers, SEAZ presentation of key findings to GFC board
Appendix D – Summary Notes from Research Team Facilitated Discussion (5/12)

Following presentation of research to cooperative members on May 1 at IRC a discussion was facilitated to start the conversation about the direction of the cooperative, the goals, and how to transition towards being a member managed and operated cooperative enterprise.

Attendees included: Five board members; Six Somali Bantu members; Two Translators; Jessica Woiderski; IRC Volunteer who will be working with the cooperative; Noreen Balos and Nigel Forrest.

Context

We framed the discussion as follows

1 - Where you are today (this is what the presentation talked about)

2 - Where do you want to be (in 5 years or more). This is your VISION

3 - What is stopping you getting there? (PROBLEMS / BARRIERS)

4 - What could you do to get over the barriers? (SOLUTIONS)

QUESTIONS

1 - What is your vision for the cooperative in 5 years time?

Want to expand in to grocery stores and restaurants

Hope to expand to other exporting to CA and other states

2 – How much of your income do you want the cooperative to provide?

We want it to be our main source of income!

3 – How long do you want to give for the cooperative to become successful?

<No clear answers>
4 – What are the problems preventing you from getting there?
We cannot produce enough just now for just 20 customers!
We don’t have enough land to grow what we need to be big.
Need to be certified to sell to grocery stores - don't need for FMs and CSA
Grocery stores and restaurants are very demanding customers – we need to be very organized and reliable in our production
Contracts are needed for restaurants or stores, even for CSA – big commitment.
[World Peas budget was shared to demonstrate that pay staff costs them $40K - $60K a year]

5 - What are you going to do next?
Need crop planning to be able to meet contracts and grow
Need to start training to do Jessica's job as soon as possible.
Koffi is ready and willing to start training now. Who else? Somali Bantu are going to discuss it and report back.
We are going to discuss transition at the next board meeting.
[no clear consensus on whether they want to pay staff to do the work or if they want to do it themselves]
## Table 1. Main CSA operational cycle sub-processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Skills / Qualities / Knowledge</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place Order</td>
<td>No. of Customers</td>
<td>Place orders with producers to build box</td>
<td>Producer Orders, Box Content List</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Mon, 8am-9am</td>
<td>Good, current operational knowledge, Good spoken English, Adaptable, fast thinking, Specialized computer, General computer use</td>
<td>Office facilities, CSA Software</td>
<td>Coordinator, Farmers, Gardeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Newsletter</td>
<td>Box List, News</td>
<td>Write newsletter with box list, recipes, and GFC news</td>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
<td>Mon, afternoon, plus other as the need arises</td>
<td>Strong English writing, Creative and resourceful, Competent computer use</td>
<td>Internet computer access, Newsletter software</td>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest Collection</td>
<td>Producer Orders, Consumables</td>
<td>Harvest produce, transport to pickup location</td>
<td>Producer receipts, Produce</td>
<td>IRC Office, farms, gardens</td>
<td>Tues, 8am-12pm</td>
<td>Produce preparation &amp; quality control, Good, current operational knowledge, Adaptable, fast thinking</td>
<td>Car, Harvest/Pickup facilities</td>
<td>Coordinator, Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Pickup</td>
<td>Produce, Newsletter, Customer List</td>
<td>Setup pickup; customers build their box; Cleanup</td>
<td>Box of Produce, Newsletter, Customer List - checked</td>
<td>IRC Lobby</td>
<td>Tues, 4pm-6pm</td>
<td>Customer service, Competent English, Basic payment acceptance</td>
<td>Harvest/Pickup facilities</td>
<td>Coordinator, Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconcile Order</td>
<td>Producer Receipts</td>
<td>Adjust producer order with actual fulfillment</td>
<td>Order fulfillment record</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Wed, approx. 2 hours</td>
<td>Specialized computer, Basic operational knowledge</td>
<td>Office facilities, CSA Software</td>
<td>Coordinator, Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. CSA Administrative processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Skills / Qualities / Knowledge</th>
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<th>Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Producers</td>
<td>· Producer information</td>
<td>Maintain records on farmers &amp; gardeners</td>
<td>· Updated producer data</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Anytime - ad hoc whilst performing other tasks</td>
<td>Specialized software</td>
<td>CSA Software</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Farmers · Gardeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay Producers</td>
<td>· Order fulfillments</td>
<td>Prepare statement and check</td>
<td>· Statement · Check</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Specialized Software Authorization</td>
<td>CSA Software Office Facilities</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Farmers · Gardeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Signup</td>
<td>· Customer approach</td>
<td>Take payment and add customer to the new season list.</td>
<td>· Updated customer list</td>
<td>IRC Lobby, online</td>
<td>First pickup of new season</td>
<td>Payment processing Competent English</td>
<td>Receive Payment Facilities</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Administration</td>
<td>· Various</td>
<td>Pay bills, file taxes, maintain &amp; audit books,</td>
<td>· Various</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Monthly, yearly</td>
<td>Various specialized skills &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>Office Facilities Checkbook / Bank Card</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Orders</td>
<td>· Order requests</td>
<td>Farmigo checking; calling farmers; tracking payments</td>
<td>· Orders</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Specialized software Some current knowledge of business Coordination &amp; management Good spoken English</td>
<td>CSA Software Office Facilities Car</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Customer · Farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Relations</td>
<td>· Inquiries</td>
<td>Responding to customers; Recruiting new customers</td>
<td>· Responses</td>
<td>IRC Office, anywhere</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
<td>Customer Service Sales / Marketing Good spoken English</td>
<td>Office Facilities</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Visits</td>
<td>· Checking status, quality</td>
<td>Checking status, quality</td>
<td>· Production Knowledge</td>
<td>Farms, gardens</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
<td>Coordination &amp; Management Good, current operational knowledge Good spoken English Farming</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em> · Farmers &amp; Gardeners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Skills / Qualities / Knowledge</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Actors (<em>Primary</em>)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Meetings</td>
<td>· Agenda</td>
<td>Discuss proposals &amp; issues, make decisions</td>
<td>· Minutes</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Meeting protocol</td>
<td>Meeting Room</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Previous minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic office administration</td>
<td>Office Facilities</td>
<td>· <em>Lawyer</em></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Translators</td>
<td>· <em>Board Members</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Liaison</td>
<td>· Info from the board</td>
<td>Bidirectional communication between board and members;</td>
<td>· Agenda Items</td>
<td>Monthly and Anytime</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· <em>Board Member</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Proposal &amp; issues from members</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Records</td>
<td>· Member info</td>
<td>Update member info; Manage member fees</td>
<td>· Membership records</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
<td>Specialized software</td>
<td>CSA Software</td>
<td>· <em>Coordinator</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Payment</td>
<td></td>
<td>· Annual report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic office administration</td>
<td></td>
<td>· Member</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Payment Processing</td>
<td></td>
<td>· Board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Meetings</td>
<td>· Elect board members for each district</td>
<td></td>
<td>· Board members</td>
<td>IRC Office</td>
<td>Yearly or on demand</td>
<td>Meeting protocol</td>
<td>Meeting Room</td>
<td>· <em>Members</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic office administration</td>
<td>Office Facilities</td>
<td>· Coordinator</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Translators</td>
<td>· Lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>