



Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award

| GENERAL INFORMATION | |
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| Location: | Jackson, Mississippi (USA) |
| Title of the Transformative Initiative: | Transition City Initiative (Jackson Just Transition Plan) |
| Name of organization: | Cooperation Jackson |
| Type of organization: | Cooperation Jackson is an emerging cooperative federation and solidarity economy catalyzer |
| Website: | https://cooperationjackson.org/ |
| Category and Edition: | Food. Transformative Cities Award 3 rd edition (2020). |
| STORYTELLING | |
| Summary | |
| <p>The Jackson Just Transition Plan is an effort to transform Jackson into a city that is ecologically regenerative; centered on economic relationships rooted in equity, solidarity and mutual aid; technologically advanced and democratically employed; and grounded in the protection and fulfillment of everyone’s fundamental human rights.</p> | |
| Context and problem definition | |
| <p>Jackson, Mississippi is the capitol of the State of Mississippi. It has a population of roughly 200,000 people. Over 80% of the population is Black/African American, with the vast majority living at or below the state’s poverty line. Underemployment is a major issue in our city, leading to negative health outcomes, such as chronic hypertension, diabetes and heart disease.</p> | |



Despite the demographics, the wealth gap between Black and white in the city is one of the worse in the country. This is primarily due to an apartheid-like economy and social order. Our aim is transforming this social order by building a democratic economy that can serve the needs of everyone in the community. In order to accomplish this mission, our founders played a key role in developing a comprehensive organizing strategy over a decade ago called the Jackson-Kush Plan.

This plan involves building people power through the building of people's assemblies, developing an independent electoral force, and build the social and solidarity economy. To date our strategy has resulted in the birth of Cooperation Jackson and the election of Mayor's Chokwe Lumumba (2013) and Chokwe Antar Lumumba (2017).

Design and Implementation

The Jackson-Kush Plan, which is at the root of our initiative, was designed and developed by three related organizations: the New Afrikan People's Organization, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the Jackson People's Assembly.

The New Afrikan People's Organization is a political organization born of the Black Power movements of the 1960's and 70's. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is a mass-based organization that focuses on defending the human rights of people of African descent. The Jackson People's Assembly is broad, predominantly Black working class political force that focuses on holding municipal, county and state government accountable and organizing autonomous community projects and programs.

The Jackson-Kush Plan was developed mutually by these organizations between 2005 and 2009, in large part in response to Hurricane Katrina and the economic and social upheaval and dislocation it caused in Mississippi and Louisiana. Cooperation Jackson is an instrument specifically created to execute a plank of the Jackson-Kush Plan, specifically to build a vibrant social and solidarity economy in Jackson.

The organization was launched in May 2014 at the historic Jackson Rising: New Economies Conference. In the effort to build this instrument, we have drawn a various forms of knowledge and skill from a variety of sources, including: The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, the Southern Grassroots Economies Project, the New Economies Coalition, the Right to the City Alliance, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, the Climate Justice Alliance, the Black Urban Farmers and Gardeners Alliance, Why Hunger, Democracy @ Work, Incite Focus, and many, many others.



The initial resources to execute the Jackson-Kush Plan and the launch of Cooperation Jackson were all drawn from volunteers and self-financing initiatives. Over the course of the last several years, Cooperation Jackson has been able to secure a significant degree of funding from various foundations throughout the United States. But, we still rely heavily on volunteer labor to advance the broad initiatives we have initiated and undertaken. Cooperation Jackson has several divisions to its overall. We have a 501c3 division and a LLC (limited liability division). An elected board, drawn from our general membership, and managed by 4 full-time staff members, governs our 501c3.

The launch of Cooperation Jackson and our effort to institute a full and complete Transition program in Jackson has been marked by many challenges from the beginning. The two primary challenges were: 1) finances and material support and 2) municipal support. Jackson is a relatively poor city, with few municipal resources, and few philanthropic resources. We have been able to draw heavily from the limited financial and human resources of our community, pooling these to be able to undertake various strategic initiatives, such as the acquisition of a number of vacant lots to establish our Community Land Trust (CLT).

We have also been able to mobilize significant numbers of members and community volunteers to supply the initiatives with ample volunteer labor to make some rather significant advances. However, if we had greater access to capital and various types of financial assistance, we would advance much further, much faster, particularly on the digital fabrication (Fab City) and sustainable dimensions of our program, to help the city move more rapidly towards becoming a zero-waste and zero-emissions city within the next 10 years.

Some of our mid-term goals include: 1. Building a Community Production Center or Fab Lab in each of the 7 wards in the city within the next 5 years. 2. Creating a Community Energy Center in each of the 7 wards within the city within the next 5 years. 3. Creating 3 Eco-Villages within the next 5 years, which includes building or retrofitting 100 homes to be completely off the grid units. 4. Building the capacity to produce 1/10th of Jackson's vegetable consumption via Urban Farms within the next 5 years. In order to attain these goals, and our ultimate goals, like making Jackson a zero-waste and zero-emissions city, capable of producing a range of local goods and services via community production we are going to need to collaborate with our municipal government to create the policy framework and social incentives necessary to achieve these aims.

We are currently building out our Ewing Street Eco-Village Pilot Project. By the end of 2019, the pilot project will consist of 2 digitally fabricated self-sustaining homes and a small solar farm that will provide a concrete illustration of what a zero-emissions community could possibly look like.

Results achieved and Evaluation

To date our major accomplishments are:

1. Helping several progressive candidates get elected to municipal offices over the last several years to help advance our policy agenda.
2. Starting a growing network of cooperatives and solidarity economy organizations.
3. Creating the Fannie Lou Hamer Community Land Trust.
4. Starting the Human Rights Institute.

All of these initiatives have helped to legitimize our vision and program in the community. Provide quality employment and wages to a growing number of Jacksonians, initiated a process to decommodify land and start the process of creating permanently affordable housing, build a broad consensus on the need for food sovereignty, and laid the foundation for the development for a human rights charter and commission to respect, protect, and fulfill the basic human rights of all Jacksonians.

Political Strategies

In order to be a transformative catalyst we employ a broad range of educational and constituent building strategies, including, but not limited to:

1. Base Building conducted primarily by doing door-to-door community outreach to build our constituent and mass membership.
2. Mass Mobilization to impact public opinion and the policy makers and power brokers in society.
3. Mass Education via our website, social media (Facebook and Twitter primarily), print media (The Cooperative Way), and audio-visual production.
4. Institution Building to carry forward strategic programmatic work, like the human rights component of our Transition City work, which is conducted by the Jackson Human Rights Institute.
5. Coalition Building to aggregate social and political power to effect change, two of our key coalition activities include the Union-Coop Initiative, to build broad unity amongst working class people in Jackson, and the Coalition for Economic Justice, to monitor, challenge and propose legislation primarily on the state level.

Communication and Cultural Strategies

In order to provide a clear visual presentation of what a Transition City in Jackson could look like we started doing a) Art House/Tech House events in the winter of 2018 to highlight the intersection of community production, which is rooted in manufacturing via digital fabrication techniques, and the arts in their full range, and b) Community Arts Festivals in 2019, which focused on displaying an Afrofuturistic vision of what the city could look like and feel like. We started by beautifying various properties in our community land trust.

Covid-19 has delayed the continuation of these initiatives in 2020. But, we are going to resume and expand them in due time.

Here are some links related to these activities:

<https://cooperationjackson.org/blog/blackaugustcommunityartsfestivalwjtvtv>

<https://cooperationjackson.org/blog/muralmagicinwestjackson>

Resources, Financing and Transformative Economy

Like most small to medium sized businesses in the United States, our economic activities have been greatly curtailed by COVID-19. We shut down all of our operations in March, with the exception of Freedom Farms. We left that open because of how central food production is during a crisis and because we could do it with proper physical distancing.

However, we have significantly regrouped in new ways since April. The most substantial way has been the production of personal protective equipment (PPE). Our Community Production Cooperative (CPC) has perfected the art producing two types of masks, 1) a cloth mask, for mass distribution and 2) a 3D print mask, for frontline workers. We have given away well over a thousand cloth masks and over 200 3D print masks to doctors, nurses, dentists, and frontline factory and retail clerk workers.

In the process of doing this work, we have tripled the productive capacity of the CPC and will start producing masks for commercial exchange in August 2020. This will provide an additional 4 jobs in our community going forward, and further proves the utility and transformative capacities of this type of production.

Related legislations

We are currently trying to change various laws in the state of Mississippi relative to cooperatives and workers rights. We are currently working with the city to advance various policies to enable cooperatives to have more operating room within the local economy.

We are also trying to change laws in the state of Mississippi that currently limit cooperatives to agricultural businesses, utilities, or credit unions.

We are also engaged in a long-term campaign to strengthen working class organizations in the state. Mississippi is a “right to work” state, meaning a state that as adopted key components of the Taft-Hartley Law that prohibit workers from rights like collective bargaining.

Finally, we are working hard to advance what we call “Just Transition Policies” throughout our municipality, county and state to adopt a suite of laws that will combat climate change the system of excessive resource extraction.

Ecological Transitions

Intent and design are the keys to Ecological transition via the application of organizing framework of the solidarity economy in our view. We design everything we possibly can to reduce carbon emissions, overproduction, and overconsumption. We do our best to recycle materials, and to so on as grand a scale as possible. For instance, we try to recycle wood and bricks in our housing rehabilitation efforts in our community land trust (CLT). But, further, we try to source and purchase our goods as close to Jackson as possible. This cut down on emissions from transportation.

We also have solarized all of our fully operational facilities. This cuts down on energy use, and emissions, but also provides others with a source of sustainable energy by supplying the cities main power grid with our excess capacity. We have also designed our cooperatives to be a synergistic and interconnected as possible. Our Farm processes organic material that is composted by our Green Team and returned to soil to keep it healthy. Both entities also supply the Community Production Cooperative with valuable materials, various types of woods and resins that are put back into productive use to do everything from make new products (like masks) to furniture and tiny houses.

Lessons learned

A few critical things that we have learned over the last 5 years in our effort to advance a transformative agenda at the Municipal Level:

1. That we have to formally organize the resources of our community into democratic loan funds, etc., in order to facilitate greater value creation and creativity in our community.
2. That we have to constantly work at building, sustaining and educating our base of constituents.
3. That we have to create our own mass media outlets and venues to tell our own story to ensure that what we want to communicate and convey is promoted and distributed, as we desire.

We are also constantly learning from the experiences of others. The Zapatista Communities in Mexico have been a great inspiration to us. As has the Kurdish experiment in Rojava, Syria. More closer to home we are continuing to learn a great deal from Incite Focus about digital fabrication and the Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative about building strategic partnerships between cooperatives and the trade unions. We are presently working on assimilating all of these critical lessons and employing them in the building and conducting of our upcoming Transition Assemblies.

Conclusion

Our strategy and planning have proven that flexible, democratic institutions and designs can work under the most adverse circumstances. We have been able to quickly repivot in the midst of a pandemic, and produce for need at a significant scale, rather than for profit, to meet some essential needs in our community.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

See the PDF version of our book “Jackson Rising: The Struggle Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi”. In this work you will find several key documents that explain our history and program. I draw your attention to four works in the book. 1. Build and Fight: The Program and Strategy of Cooperation Jackson. 2. The Jackson-Kush Plan: The Struggle for Black Self-Determination and Economic Democracy 3. The Jackson Just Transition Plan: A Vision to make Jackson a Sustainable City 4. Casting Shadows: Chokwe Lumumba and the Struggle for Racial Justice and Economic Democracy in Jackson, MS.

1. Fearless Cities Conference: Organizing and Municipalist Platform Platform
<http://navigatingthestorm.blogspot.com/2017/09/fearlesscities-conference-organizing.html>
2. Black Power Takes Root in the Heart of Dixie
[http://navigatingthestorm.blogspot.com/2017/06/black-power-take s-root-in-heart-of-dixie.html](http://navigatingthestorm.blogspot.com/2017/06/black-power-take-s-root-in-heart-of-dixie.html)
3. Learning from Mississippi
<http://navigatingthestorm.blogspot.com/2017/03/learning-from-mississippi-cooperation.html>
4. Jackson Rising: Interview with Sacajawea Hall
<http://atlantablackstar.com/2017/10/16/jackson-rising-saki-hall-cooperation-jackson-intersection-gender-economics/>
5. Building Power in a Frontline Community: The Cooperation Jackson Model
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08854300.2016.1195180>

Covid-19 outbreak impact

Many of these have been described and alluded to above. What we will list here are some links that outline how we have adapted and what we have created, which in part includes a broad inter/national coalition called the People’s Strike, which is challenging the capitalist response to the Pandemic.

People’s Strike: <https://peoplesstrike.org/peoples-strike-and-the-uprising-an-open-letter/>

Build and Fight Formula: <https://cooperationjackson.org/announcementsblog/2020/6/24/the-build-and-fight-formula>

3D Print Mask Tutorial: <https://cooperationjackson.org/announcementsblog/rbg90xmasktutorial>

Putting Black Power to Emergency Use: <https://cooperationjackson.org/blog/puttingblackempowermentoemergencyuse>