

# MINNESOTA TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER COOPERATIVE

## FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

April 29, 2023

September 1, 2021, a group of independent contractor court interpreters embarked together on a great adventure, forming a worker-owned cooperative. With the support of the TNG-CWA Local 37002, MPLS C-TAP, and the LEDC, the little C-corp we registered with the State of MN and has blossomed into a successful business and supportive community that we now call The Minnesota Translator and Interpreter Cooperative (MNTIC).

We are excited to share some of the highlights from our first full year of operations.

### **Goals and Milestones**

#### **1. The Goals**

The Minnesota Translator and Interpreter Cooperative (MNTIC) was proposed as a model for what a unionized worker cooperative of freelance workers could be to its members, its clients and the community at large. Thanks to the support and generosity of so many we were able to meet the majority of our goals for our start-up year.

The cooperative provided its members:

- New work opportunities with 53 different clients, many of them becoming regular, repeat customers!
- A means for greater bargaining power, bypassing legal antitrust issues for independent contractors. We proudly set our own competitive rates, allowing the members fair compensation for their work.
- Greater control over working conditions.
- Benefits otherwise unattainable by private contractors such as vision, dental and life insurance through the CWA, E&O insurance, and memberships to professional organizations like the Federation of Worker-owned Cooperative, the MN Chamber of Commerce, the ATA and more!
- Access to interpreter specific technology such as Wordfast and use of our very own wireless interpreting equipment.
- Physical and digital spaces for information sharing
- Community and collegiality

The cooperative provided its clients:

- Professional, credentialed and highly experienced interpreters and translation services. For example the Public Defenders Office and Legal Aid appreciate having a one-stop-shop for certified judicial interpreters with criminal, civil and immigration experience.
- A means to increase client's business or participation by facilitating communication within the market or community of limited English speakers
- Education on the need for high quality interpreters
- Guidance as to the best uses of technology in interpreting, educating clients on the use of wireless equipment and remote simultaneous interpreting functions.
- Exceptional customer service

The cooperative provided to the greater community:

- A link to legal and social justice
- Full participation of non-English speakers in community at large
- Education to organizations and the community about the importance of quality interpretation and language equity
- A model for other gig economy workers across the country
- Make quality interpreting the norm!

Our goal was to create a functional enterprise that is fully self-supporting within 24 months of launch, with a diversity of revenue streams and a happy, more secure, and more engaged membership.

Our measures include the # of new members, amount of member equity raised, overall revenue and percentage of revenue secured from new (non-judicial) sources, % of revenue returned to members, new work secured for members, breakeven financial performance, customer satisfaction and member satisfaction.

## 2. Our specific milestones and benchmarks

Some measures we are using to track progress on these goals and expected benchmarks include:

- 1) **Original benchmarks for member; member equity:** MNTIC anticipated launching with a minimum of 10 members, rising to 20 members in 6 months after a targeted membership campaign, and 50 members by the end of our first year. Representation of a wide variety of languages is also a goal.

**Actual Year 1 Results-** MNTIC launched with 6 members, adding 7 new members in 2022 for a total of 13 members the first year. The board decided not to actively recruit members due to difficulty in hiring an executive director, resulting in considerably lower membership than originally anticipated. We did meet the goal of having a diversity of languages including, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Oromo and Somali.

- 2) **Percentage of non-judicial revenue:** One of the objectives of MNTIC is to help members diversify their revenue streams, and increase average hourly income. We hoped to achieve this in our initial years primarily by securing new work for members from other public bodies and from the private sector (which tends to pay a higher rate). Our plan was to achieve 25% revenue from non-judicial sources by the end of our first year, with the rate increasing to 50% by the end of year 2 and 75% by the end of year 3.

**Actual Year 1 Results** - MNTIC flipped this projection. Surprisingly, the coop's largest source of revenue from the very beginning was the community non-profit sector NOT our judicial partners.

At launch the coop had worked with 13 clients in the first 4 months between incorporating in September of 2021 and the official launch in January of 2022. Of the 13, 4 were in the legal field, 6 were non-profits, and 3 were private business.

By the end of year 1 the coop had 53 clients! Of those 19 are private companies or universities, 27 are non-profits and only 7 government entities.

- 3) **Percentage of Interpretation Vs. Translation Revenue:** *We projected that the vast majority of work would be interpreting and a small percentage would be translation work.*

**Actual Year 1 Results** : *Much to our surprise the interpretation/translation split was almost an even split, and in a wider variety of languages than anticipated.*

- 4) **Breakeven and profitability:** we hoped to be able to breakeven on a monthly basis, covering all of our monthly staff and operating expenses, by month 18. By the end of our second year, we expect to be generating a regular profit that can then be used to deliver additional benefits to members and/or pay patronage dividends.

**Actual Year1 Results** - The coop was profitable and able to cover all of its expenses in 2022 in large part due to the generous grant from the CWA. In 2023, the coop will need to invoice \$600/month more each month to pay all of our expenses including our operations manager, and \$1,000/month increase in invoiced work to be profitable in 2023.

- 5) **Member satisfaction:** A primary goal of MNTIC is to create a better working environment for our interpreters. We will conduct at least annual member surveys and focus groups to ensure that we are on track and delivering value to our members, both economically and socially.

**Year 1 Results** - A survey of our members shows that they are proud to be worker-owners of our coop and they feel a sense of community with their fellow members. It also shows we have some improvement to make in some of our systems.

## **What did we achieve over the first year?**

### Timeline

Business - While the co-op worked to smooth out operations during the first 6 months, a communications consultant and eventually marketing and admin support were contracted to work on designing a marketing plan and creating relationships, procuring new work opportunities in the public and private sectors.

Community - Members were able to feel a sense of community right from the get-go through the co-op slack platform and monthly community gatherings. Members were great ambassadors for the co-op and the profession, working to make quality interpreting the norm.

Pre-launch activities by the Steering included; writing the bylaws, completing a business plan, surveying potential members, searching for an ED.

Green writing and check marks designate completed tasks, although not necessarily in that specific timeslot.

	Months 1 -3	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	1 Year
Member No.	10 (7 actual)	20` (10 actual)	30 (13 actual)	50 (13 actual)
Structure	Bylaws Written <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (pre-launch) Board Elected <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Staff	Full-time Executive Director hired	Administrative Assistant hired	Emma Coleman Hired as Marketing and Admin	
Office Space and Equipment	Virtual Office Basic Office equipment		Office Space including studio for VRI, meeting space	
Interpreter Tech	Digital Combined Glossary Portable Interpreting Equipment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Access to additional digital platforms <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Equipment for VRI studio, including computer, headsets, cameras, lighting	
System for Searching for Work and Allotting Assignments	Implements system for assigning work and invoicing. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Design marketing materials <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Compile list of potential new clients <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Actively Marketing to para judicial partners, private law firms. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal of building extra-judicial business to 25% <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Apply for City and State Certifications and Contracts as WO/MO/SB	Goal of building extra-judicial business to 75% <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<p>Member Community Support and Member Benefits</p>	<p>Co-op Interpreter Chat <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Digital Glossary</p> <p>Monthly Interpreter Meet-up <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>E&amp;O Insurance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Shared Professional Memberships <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Access to dental and vision <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> insurance, Access to 401K</p>	<p>Lending Library for resources and equipment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Access to health insurance</p>	<p>Newsletter to disseminate members and partner organizations</p> <p>Continuing Ed.</p> <p>Advocacy around certification of additional languages</p>
<p>Involvement in the greater community</p>	<p>Making Quality Interpreting the Norm <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Members will be ambassadors of the co-op and show what quality interpreting looks like <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Efforts to educate public and private entities on the importance of language equity</p>		<p>Sliding scale or pro bono services for qualified non-profits and individuals in need of quality interpreting services</p>

Thanks to the generous support of the following organizations and individual this group of interpreters made the dream of owning thier own business a reality.

**The TNG-CWA Local 37002** - Without the generous financial and technical support of the CWA Special Initiatives Fund MNTIC likely would not have formed. Specifically, Rica Highers and Candace Lund suppered and helped guide the steering committe through the grant application process. After incorporation, Candace facilitated grant administration and worked with the national office to determine if and how the coop could fully unionize. Although it was ultimately determined we could not become full members, MNTIC is proud of its associate membership.

**Mpls C-TAP** - Technical support from this program indcluded connecting MNTIC with training through the city's free coop classes; legal support from Davis Law; and overall support from Margaret Lund.

**Margaret Lund** - Margaret Lund's expertise on worker-owned cooperatives has been invaluable. From working on the original feasibility study, the grant application, bylaws, boad

trainings, financial projections and more. Margaret's knowledge and sage advice have been a grounding force for the coop's board. It's been a privilege and a pleasure to have Margaret accompany us on this journey. We couldn't have done this without her!

**LEDC** - Henry Jimenez, Executive Director of the Latino Economic Development Center, has supported MNTIC by agreeing to become our Fiscal Sponsor and advising the board on grants, certifications and so much more. Every conversation with Henry is inspiring.

We would also like to thank: Jorge Amerigo, website and logo design; Claire Cominsky, communications; Emma Coleman, marketing and admin; Livia Lund, grant writing; Matt Fast, graphic design consulting