

Custom Collaborative (CC) aims to transform women's lives by providing work and business opportunities in New York City's garment industry. In 2016, we successfully launched our pilot training program.



Early support from forward-thinking donors enabled CC to devise and execute a business strategy, and to attract additional donors and partners. In January 2016, CC began to deliver our highly rated Training Institute. At the same time, we continued to pursue intermediate planning for two additional phases of CC's operation: a worker-owned Cooperative and a small-business Incubator.

"I knew when I left my home and came to this country that people would help me" -- Sara

Custom Collaborative's 2016 Timeline

- January-December: Created relationships with nonprofit and for-profit partners to increase our impact and to supplement our training with expert lectures, industry visits, and arts trips
- March: Enrolled and engaged 25 volunteer advisors and board members
- May: Raised money sufficient to purchase basic equipment and fully fund our pilot training program
- May-September: Determined human resource needs, created job descriptions, and recruited and hired paid and volunteer staff for key roles
- May-December: Repurposed and recycled thousands of yards of textiles, paper, and other supplies, preventing them from becoming landfill waste
- August: Developed curricula in entrepreneurship and in garment design and manufacturing
 - CC's entrepreneurship curriculum was developed by a team of entrepreneurs with expertise in training entrepreneurs, low-skill workers, and immigrants



Annual Report 2016

- CC's garment curriculum was created by fashion industry professors, trainers, designers, and production professionals

- September: Developed a recruitment-and-screening process to attract and evaluate Training Institute applicants, resulting in 60 applications for 10 trainee openings
 - Created an ideal-trainee profile
 - Recruited applicants through our website and through community events and street canvassing; we reached out to other nonprofits, including churches and mosques, and to braiding salons and similar local businesses; we held six open houses
 - Enlisted recruitment partners, including WIN, Washington Heights/Inwood Development Corporation, Harlem Commonwealth, African Services Committee, Hot Bread Kitchen, Ariva, Hope Community, and New York Urban League
 - Screened applicants using written applications (the highest annual income reported by applicants was \$16,000), personal interviews, and literacy assessments
 - Enrolled an inclusive cohort of applicants from Angola, Jamaica, Mexico, Nigeria, Panama, and the US; some had never worked for pay before, all were highly motivated
- September-December: Referred participants, as needed, to agencies providing assistance with issues of domestic violence, family law, child care, housing, literacy, and immigration
- October-December: Provided group-leadership and problem-solving opportunities to the cohort and to individual trainees
- October-December: Surveyed trainees for their feedback on CC's programming

Our first cohort was scheduled to complete the pilot training program in late January 2017. By the end of December 2016 one trainee had gotten a job offer, and another had begun collecting resources for her business.

All of our graduating trainees are eligible to apply for the worker-owned Cooperative that CC is developing in cooperation with Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement and with the guidance of Democracy at Work Institute and others. Worker cooperatives are vehicles that can assist people with immigration status irregularities earn living wages. In 2017 and beyond, CC plans to devote special resources to this phase of our operation.



Like Sara, who fled her country because of religious persecution and genocide, CC's immigrant women have come to the US in flight from circumstances at home and in search of safety and opportunity. CC's work is vital to helping these women realize their dreams of building a future for themselves and their children by learning valuable skills, earning living wages, and developing strong networks.



Annual Report 2016

Custom Collaborative thanks you for your support. We look forward to continued partnership with you as we work together to create opportunity for women in New York.

"I am here because I don't want to devalue my worth" -- Keisha