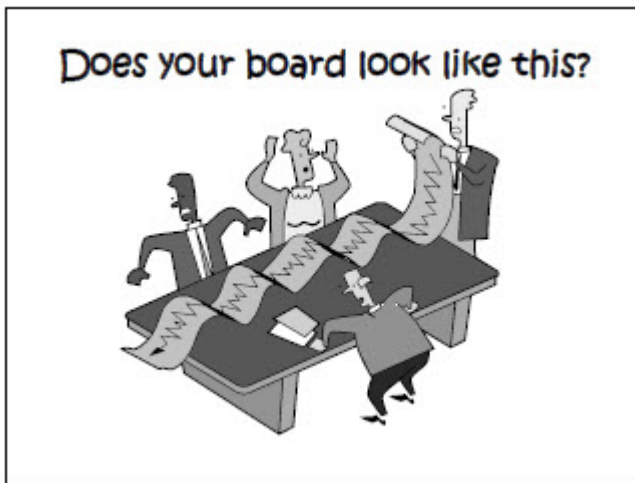


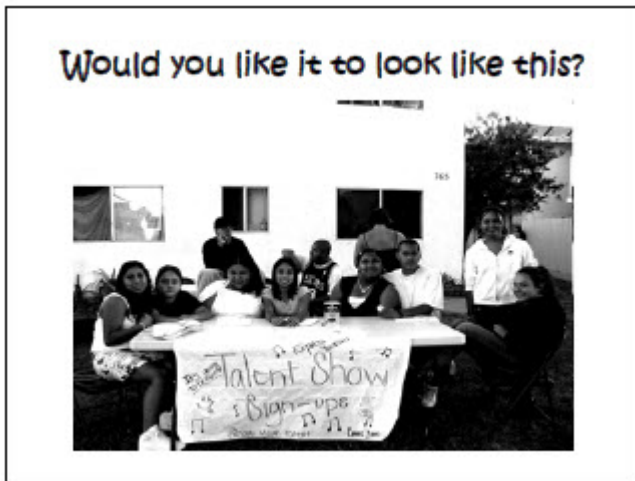
Developing a Sense of Community In Co-ops



By Richard Berendson

We have learned again there is no life where we do not build.
This one year had meaning, this one year had a reason for being,
and to know this aliveness once is to remember it forever...
Out of us, out of our dreams and work and thoughts,
we built this house.
we did it ourselves, our job, our handiwork, and our pride.”

-Laia Hanau, Two Dollar House



SHORT HISTORY OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Rochdale

Modern cooperative enterprise, as a form of business organization, began in Rochdale, England, in 1844, in the context of the Industrial Revolution. At the time, modernization and mechanization created very rich industrialists and many very poor laborers - including children and women - who crowded into cities and worked in very poor conditions. A group of weavers in Rochdale - a company town - found themselves indebted to the company store because their wages were not sufficient to provide food and goods to their families, and the products available in stores not only were expensive, but they were also low quality - flour was mixed with lime, coffee with chicory, and false weights and measures were used. None of the weavers was able to start another store on his or her own, but by scrimping and saving, they were able to pool their resources and open a store together. They wanted to break their dependence on the factory owners, who controlled production and jobs, and on shop owners, who controlled consumer goods. On October 24, 1844, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers established themselves with the accumulated savings of 29 weavers and opened their first store before Christmas.

The Rochdale Pioneers developed several principles for the operation of their business intending to guarantee that the cooperative would remain a democratic, member-controlled enterprise. These principles have been updated and revised over the years and are currently recognized as the Statement of Cooperative Identity, which was adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance in 1995.

Where do we start?

- Start by focusing "first and foremost on providing extraordinary community results." Hildy Gottlieb



Mondragon

Cooperatives have since spread to more than 100 countries. In many parts of the world, co-ops have grown to become dominant players in certain industries. In Mondragon, Spain, an entire cooperative economy has developed. In Mondragon, over 20,000 jobs exist in over 100 worker-owned industrial plants. In addition, co-ops provide housing, education, consumer goods and financial services.

STATEMENT OF COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

Adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance to Revise The Principles Of Cooperation, September 1995

Definition: A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Values: Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.



Principles: The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice:

1st Principle: Voluntary & Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of members, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women servicing as elected representatives are accountable to the membership In primary co-

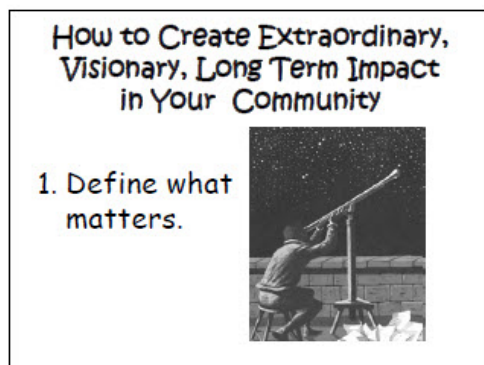
operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), and co-operatives on other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative, and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy & Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.



5th Principle: Education, Training & Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public-particularly young people and opinion leaders about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, and international structures.

7th Principle: Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

**How to Create Extraordinary,
Visionary, Long Term Impact
in Your Community**

**2. Put what
matters
into action.**



Defining What Matters

1. Create a vision

- What difference do we want to make? For whom?
- What would their lives, and our organization, be like if we are successful?



GLOBAL VILLAGE

Computer and internet technology provides easy means of communicating beyond the limits of any geographic community, and most students have access to the internet and email.

Web Pages: Many co-ops, including many student co-ops, are building an internet presence. They have discovered web pages to keep in touch with co-op alumni, reach new members, etc. The more successful pages include:

- Pictures of co-op houses, storefronts, and members
- Information about becoming a member
- History and description of your co-op
- Links to other pages (i.e. Coop Associations)

Many co-ops are beginning to use their web pages to deliver direct services. Some include regular updates on vacancies, membership applications, profiles of members, etc.

Some co-ops use email discussion groups to keep committee members in touch with one another and to disperse information.

Defining What Matters

2. Create a Mission

What will we do to bring our vision to reality?

- Example:
 - Not just a shelter to help animals.....
 - Creating a more humane community in every way - where all life is valued.



COMMUNITY ACTION

Support other Community Groups

Many co-op members are active in community organizations. Co-ops oftentimes have meeting spaces or living rooms which other community groups can use for meetings.

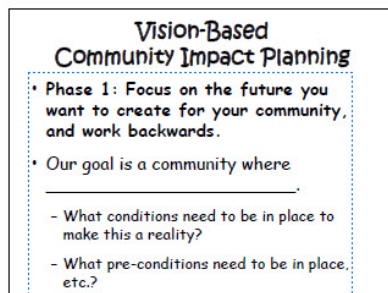
- Co-ops in California are active in a homeless garden project. Individuals and groups join the garden project which provides jobs for homeless people planting, tending, and harvesting the garden - they purchase many of their fruits and vegetables from this organic garden.
- ICC-Ann Arbor and other co-ops have been active with Habitat for Humanity. Co-op members devote a day or a weekend to working with Habitat and contributing to affordable housing in their community. An added benefit is that co-op members gain skills that can benefit the co-op.

- Madison Community Co-op in Wisconsin sometimes donates the proceeds from parties to local charities or community groups. Sometimes the cover charge for a party is a can of food to be donated to the Food Bank.

Membership Recruitment

One of the most important things co-ops do is recruit new members. Many co-ops use membership recruitment as an opportunity to reach out to other groups and organizations.

- Co-op in Chicago advertises their co-op on the poster for a student-run film series.
- Many co-ops man booths during fairs and community events.
- If your co-op uses flyers as a method of recruiting members, co-op members working together to design, produce and distribute flyers can help build a strong sense of community among them.
- The ICC-Ann Arbor co-ops in the past have sponsored speakers and symposia.
- Beal House in East Lansing, Michigan, filled its coffers a few years back by sponsoring screenings of films.



Co-op Fairs and Bashes

Some co-ops sponsor regional festivals in the spring. These festivals - currently held among the Midwestern co-ops - provide an opportunity for co-op members in a certain region to get together for a day of fun and learning. These events are hosted on a quasi-rotational basis among the co-ops in each region and are great chances for co-op members to unite to present an exciting program of events. Further, nothing establishes a sense of community like a road trip to another co-op.

- The co-ops in Madison, Wisconsin, hold a co-op fair each spring. They host speakers and bands, have booths from all of the co-ops in town, and offer some courses as well.
- Midwest association properties member co-ops are currently considering creating their own event.

Vision-Based Community Impact Planning

- Phase 2: What steps can we take in the next 12-24 months to begin working toward our goal?
 - What do we need to learn?
 - Who could assist?
 - How do our current programs fit into the new plan?



Vision-Based Community Impact Planning

- **Phase 3: Focusing on the organization.**

- What do we need to have in place to ensure every function of the organization is healthy enough for us to create the kind of community we dream of?
- Includes personnel, facilities, equipment, maintenance, finances, board development, community engagement, etc.

Regional Networking

IN THE CO-OP

While interacting with people outside the co-op can help develop a sense of community and build support for co-ops in the neighborhood/region, many people are attracted to co-ops because of the inherent community-building aspects of cooperative organization. People living, working, and eating together generally build strong bonds together. Here are some methods to enhance that process:

Newsletter

Most co-ops produce a newsletter on a regular basis. Besides being a good source for information on committee meetings, board decisions, and upcoming events, newsletters can also be a forum for presenting new ideas to members, publishing artwork, stories, or poetry by members, or providing amusement and fun to members.

As an outreach mechanism, newsletters can be used to spread the word to alumni, prospective members, and individuals who are interested in or need to be persuaded to respect co-ops.

Co-op newsletters often include sections for special announcements, sometimes called “pine cones” because a symbol of cooperatives is the twin pines logo, in which members offer special thanks or comments for general consumption.

Consider sending copies of your co-op’s newsletter to other co-ops

Vision-Based Community Impact Planning

- **Phase 4: Monitoring Progress & Results**
 - Do it at every meeting.
 - Make adjustments as needed.
 - Act in accordance with your highest goals - walk your talk!



Progressive Dinners

Some co-ops have established a tradition of holding progressive dinners a couple of times a year. Members spend an evening visiting several co-op houses in the co-op system. Appetizers are eaten at one co-op, soup, and salad at another, the main course at a third house, etc. During a progressive dinner, co-op members meet folks from other houses, make friends and taste the best food each co-op can come up with, and end up knowing a lot more about the co-op, the people who live there, and who can make the best food.

Putting What Matters into Action - PLANNING

- "Creating a plan is the only way a board can proactively lead an organization... (and) not always be putting out fires."
- The plan is aimed at "creating... improvement to the community's quality of life... creating something extraordinary."

Brunch or Meal Exchanges

Some co-op houses host other co-ops for brunch or other meals. The Chicago co-ops hold regular Friday night banquets which rotate among the two co-op houses, a co-op apartment building, and a large apartment where several co-op alumni live.

New Member Orientation

Your co-ops member orientation is a great place to begin developing the co-op spirit. A good orientation is a blend of business - where to pay charges, how to deal with conflict, how to bring an issue to the board - and fun activities like role-playing, games, food, etc. Many co-ops to increase attendance at orientations, now require co-op members to attend.

Before resorting to these requirements, perhaps co-ops should instead try to develop an orientation that people will want to come to.

Annual Meeting

Co-ops in general strive to make their annual meetings a good mixture of business and fun. Maybe between officer and staff reports the co-op can squeeze in fun activities like a co-op “family feud” game, door prizes, performances, etc. It’s a good idea to include food at the meeting.

- East Lansing, Michigan, hosts two all-member meetings annually. Spring / Winter All Member Party and Orientation. these meetings are good times to get all co-op members together.
- Co-ops generally tie their annual meeting to special group events like progressive dinners, utilizing their common courtyard to make tie-dyed T-shirts, ice cream sundaes, cake walks, etc. Each co-op spends time prior to the meeting on a group activity - like making special nametags - so the annual meeting is also a strong display of unity and leads to friendly rivalries among the co-op.

Summer Education Program

Ann Arbor has an extensive summer education program. The co-op invites a cooperator from another part of the world as their guest for the summer to present their ideas about cooperation and how co-ops work in other countries

Remember what boards do?

- Leadership
- Legal oversight
- Operational oversight
- Board mechanics
- All must be related to the vision, mission and values.



Alternative Spring Break

Some coops coordinate an alternative spring break program during which one co-op sends some members to stay in another co-op or community and volunteer for local community organizations for a week or so.

IN YOUR HOUSE

The Real Power of Boards

- "The board can be conscious of the power they have, in every decision, to change lives, to make a difference - to create the future of their community."



Cooperative Games

A co-op is one that everyone that everyone can join in, non-competitive (there are no winners and no losers. The Cooperative Sports and Games Book and The Second Cooperative Sports and Games Book, both by Terry Olick. Examples of co-op games include:

- **Parachute Games:** An old parachute can be the beginning of lots of co-op games for member orientations and other informal gatherings. Everyone (10-20 people) grabs the edge of the parachute and makes a big circle with the chute in the middle. At this point, you can bounce stuff around on it, run across or under it, billow it up and sit underneath in a kind of mushroom cave, etc.
- **Ball tosses.** These can be great ways to get to know people in a group. Standing in a circle, people toss balls, teddy bears, and other throwables. When you catch the ball, you have to say your name and the name of the people you caught from and throw it to. Try to get several balls going around at once.
- **The human knot.** A small group of people all huddle in a bunch. Everyone reaches out and grabs one hand from one person and another hand from someone else. Try to untangle the knot into a circle of people holding hands, without letting go of anyone.

What is your mission?



Work Holiday

The best way to build a sense of community, sense of ownership, and pride in your co-op is through all co-op members working as a group to solve some problem or to improve the co-op in some way. The most common example of this is the working holiday. This is a time - generally a weekend - when everyone in the co-op works together to do spring cleaning, paint the house, do minor maintenance, etc. Afterward, the co-op generally buys food or beer or has a small party for house members only. Members generally take much more pride in the co-op (and much better care of it) after they've invested some "sweat equity." Here are some dos and don'ts about work holidays:

Celebrate!

- Appreciate that you're aiming high
- Celebrate each small success
- Celebrate everyone's efforts -
 - Your energy
 - Your excitement
 - Your pride in going for what really matters



Do

- Start out the morning with donuts, bagels, juice, and coffee for everyone.
- Plan the activities to be undertaken at house meetings before the holiday.
- Find tasks for each member that they will be interested in doing
- The whole thing together. Nothing defeats the benefits of a working holiday more than having people working all by themselves. If people have to make up work holiday labor, try to form a small group of people who can work together for the make-up.
- End up the working holiday with low-prep time meal - like ordering pizza.

Don't

- Have a big party to celebrate the completion of the working holiday - you'll have to do it all again after the party.
- Leave projects unfinished. If it's too big to accomplish during the holiday, then it should be dealt with through other means.
- Forget that work holidays, in addition to being times to spiffy up the co-op, are the optimum times to instill a sense of member ownership among co-op members.

The New Board Training

- "It is time to stop looking at governance as a 'problem to be solved,' and instead see governance as an 'opportunity to change the world.' " Hildy Gottlieb

Your board can make a real difference in your community!

Mentorship / Apprentices

Athens, Ohio, operates a mentorship program during which positions for the upcoming term are selected by new and continuing members during the previous term. Current job holders teach the future job holders how things work in the co-op, how to do their jobs, etc. This also provides each new member with a buddy who shows them how things work and helps them become a part of the co-op community.

Food

Food is the center of co-op life. Having regular meals, plus special brunches, and dinners once in a while, are great community builders. Further, no co-op event is complete without some type of food.

Pollyanna Principles

by Hildy Gottlieb

The Ends

- # 1 - We accomplish what we hold ourselves accountable for.
- # 2 - Each and every one of us is creating the future, every day, whether we do so consciously or not.

<http://www.help4nonprofits.com/H4NP.htm> <http://pollyannaprinciples.org/>

Pollyanna Principles, cont.

The Means:

- # 3 - Everyone and everything is interconnected and interdependent, whether we acknowledge that or not.
- # 4 - "Being the change we want to see" means walking the talk of our values.
- # 5 - Strength builds upon our strengths, not our weaknesses.
- # 6 - Individuals will go where systems lead them.