

ARE CO-OPS FOR YOU? Part 3: Decision-making Tips

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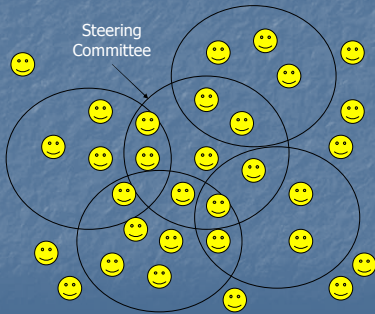
Building a Strong Organization

- You need a strong foundation for growth.
- A clear structure is essential.
- Create varying levels of involvement.
- Decision-making processes must be clear.
- Clear communication is also essential.
- Maintain an inclusive atmosphere.
- Nurture leadership among participants.

Foundation: Quality, not Quantity

- At first, your primary concern is finding members who are engaged and active.
- Sheer number of members will be important later.
- Therefore, you should establish some ways of educating members about co-ops, and how they can fit into yours.

A Co-op Committee Structure



Structure: General Traits

- It should be strong but flexible.
 - Have a backup plan.
 - Do not rely too much on individuals.
 - Circumstances change, give room for individual action in emergencies.
- Take care to follow agreed-upon process, even when it seems unnecessary. This builds good habits.

Structure: the Nucleus

- The steering committee is a precursor to a board of directors, and usually consists primarily of prospective co-op members.
- It may also include representatives of local associations or organizations.
- It serves as the nucleus for the project.
- It will ideally delegate some activities to other committees and individuals.

Useful for a Steering Committee

- Business Experience & Industry Familiarity
- Communication and Outreach Skills
- Facilitation Skills
- Fundraising Experience
- Access to specialists:
 - Lawyer
 - Accountant

Structure: Other Committees

- Committees are very useful things.
- Ideally each committee's membership will include two steering committee members.
- Committees will help to keep the steering committee's job manageable
- To keep committees happy, they should be given clearly limited but meaningful responsibility and power.

Structure: Delegation

- The steering committee can't do it all, but is ultimately responsible for decisions.
- Other committees provide more opportunities for member involvement.
- In many cases, the steering committee will give final approval to delegated work. This must be absolutely clear up front.
- Delegation can be ad-hoc, but committee charters are very helpful.
- Decisions can be delegated to individuals.

Structure: Committee Charters

1. Establish which committees you need:
 - Organizational, Membership, Outreach, Fundraising
2. Committee members develop a proposal
 - Includes: rights, duties, frequency, contacts
3. Steering committee votes on charter.
 - Proposal is brought to Steering Committee, ideally presented by non-SC member.
4. Repeat as needed.

Varied Levels of Involvement

- Some people may be intimidated by the thought of joining the steering committee.
- Other committees provide a more focused sense of responsibility, which is likely to appeal to some more than the daunting prospect of "leading" the co-op effort.
- Committee participation builds familiarity, and can lead to a greater leadership role.

Even More Varied Levels

- Some people don't want the commitment of a committee membership.
- Committees should be on the lookout for tasks that are suitable for a volunteer. These can be scheduled or non-scheduled, one-time or routine.
 - Working on fundraisers
 - Data entry
- These tasks can lead to committee membership.
- A volunteer coordinator is very helpful.

Decision-making

- In order to move a group forward, it is important to know how decisions are made. This will help you avoid difficulties, or questions of legitimacy.
- Who makes decisions?
- How are decisions made?
- How are decisions recorded and communicated?

Decisions: Empowerment

- Decisions should originate with the steering committee.
- In some cases, emergency decisions must be made; you should plan for this.
- As your cooperative matures, there will be more structures to create.

Decisions: Process

- Voting or Consensus?
 - Essential to decide which to use. There may be a mixture within your organization.
- Autocratic or Democratic?
 - Democratic is generally preferred, but delegation can set up very limited areas of autocratic decision-making.
 - Autocratic should be reserved for decisions that don't affect anyone else.

Decisions: Meetings

- Most decisions are made at meetings.
- Meetings are often the most frustrating thing about any organization, and cooperatives tend to have a lot of them.
- Facilitation and an agenda are essential aids for making meetings run smoothly.
- Make time limits and stick to them.
- Beware of "accidental" meetings.

Communication: Channels

- Have clear channels for communication.
 - What records are kept, and where?
 - Who is responsible for giving reports?
 - How is information shared with the membership?
 - How is information shared with the public?
 - What information is shared with whom?

Communication: Reports

- This is the main way that one hand knows what the others are doing.
- Giving regular reports maintains a level of accountability. Ideally they should include a follow-up from the previous report.
- Reports should be fairly brief; if someone wants more information, they can ask.

Communication: Language

- Understand what you are doing, or at least have a common language about it.
 - Trainings are very helpful, as sometimes people need help articulating their ideas.
 - Be on the lookout for readings to share.
- Keep in mind that cooperatives are often a new experience for people, and words can be used in a variety of conflicting ways.

Inclusive Atmosphere

- Meetings should be orderly.
- Beware of in-jokes.
- Appoint "board buddies" to help new members get acclimated.
- Make information available:
 - Orientation packet
 - Minutes of past meetings
 - Contact information

Inclusiveness: Dealing with Conflict

- Conflict can be very disruptive, but having a process in place will help.
- Make decisions about resolving conflict and creating accountability before you need them.
- Avoid having to decide how to make decisions while you are making a decision.

Nurture Leadership

- For someone to move into leadership, they must be comfortable with their current situation. Having an organization that makes sense will be a great help.
- It is also important to keep in mind that leadership is a set of skills and behaviors, rather than a personality trait.

Thank You!

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