

CREATING AND IMPROVING YOUR OPERATIONS HANDBOOK

The Overview

You began with a vision and a core team- and now you have secured the means to open your food co-op. This guide can help you channel your momentum into a fully operational food collective on your campus. Or perhaps, you're already operational, but you want to make some improvements so that your co-op can really thrive. This guide can help you transform your concerns into meaningful solutions. Structured by four select areas that deserve attention in a typical co-op operating handbook: Operations, Policy, Governance, Programming, each section is designed to help your team decide how your co-op will proceed by highlighting key areas of concern and the approaches that existing student co-ops are taking to address them.

How to use this guide

The process of creating and improving an operations handbook both invigorates a cooperative and is critical to its long-term success. This guide is intended to aid students who have succeeded in starting any type of food co-op - café or deli, market or grocery, food cart, truck, stand, etc. - to develop their own operations handbook and help functioning co-ops tailor their handbook to be more reflective of how they do business.

The Table of Contents and general outline are designed to serve as a template. Using the sections and information here as a point of departure, students can create their own handbooks that manage to reflect the core philosophy of their group and provide a backbone for its operations. Thinking about key concerns and the alternative approaches, students can address pivotal questions about how their co-op governs itself and operates on a daily basis.

Why CoFED created this guide

CoFED aims to help your co-op succeed by providing a template with important considerations that can help you operate sustainably. Beyond the direct use of creating and improving your operations handbook, CoFED intends for this guide to create a foundation for shared dialogue among student co-ops.

Many of the co-ops featured in this guide may have similar commitments to food justice or perhaps have encountered similar obstacles on their campuses. There also may be interesting differences worth exploring. Look into whether there are co-ops in your region and seek out opportunities to collaborate. Engaging this network can create support for your organization and can serve as a meaningful gesture of solidarity with the student cooperative movement-at-large.

Powered by a network of Regional Organizers and a growing national and regional network, CoFED is committed to helping your co-op succeed and become a model for the value of student-run cooperatives. Get in touch with your organizer by visiting our www.cofed.org and sending an email to your respective Regional Organizer. We can't wait to work with you!

Who helped make this guide possible

This guide came out of CoFED's strategic plan, which is indebted to several dozen supporters who helped our organization move in the right direction. As well, the information in this guide derives from interviews with several student-run food cooperatives which graciously offered their insight at least once:

Earthfoods Café, University of Massachusetts: Amherst

Founded in 1976 to address the lack of healthy, inexpensive food on campus, today this all-vegetarian café is an example of how a collectively managed business can grow and prosper.

Mixed Nuts, Hampshire College

Created in 1972, this storefront and buyers' club provides cheap, organic, and natural food to the students at Hampshire College and is run entirely by student volunteers without administrative funding.

Agora Café, University of British Columbia

Organized as a student volunteer-run operation in 2005, Agora is an innovative café that embraces UBC's movement toward sustainability and food security, while simultaneously providing meaningful experiences for its volunteers.

Sprouts, University of British Columbia

A 100% volunteer and student-run organization that started in 1997, Sprouts operates a café, bulk buying club, and green box delivery program and hosts a by-donation lunch on Fridays.

MD Food Collective, University of Maryland: College Park

Tracing its roots back to students operating a guerrilla sandwich line in 1975, the Maryland Food Collective now functions as a sandwich deli that also serves hot meals and some grocery items. It is committed to maintaining its cooperative structure and providing a healthy, conscious alternative to campus food.

Kresge Community Natural Foods, University of California: Santa Cruz

Spanning a tradition of twenty years providing food to the Kresge campus community, the Kresge Food Co-op is run by students, providing a discount to its members and opportunities for bulk-buying and supporting a variety of campus sustainability projects.

Flaming Eggplant, Evergreen State College

Run and funded by students at Evergreen State College, this café dates back to 2004 with students organizing to create an alternative to corporate food service on their campus. It stays open for lunch and dinner to provide the campus locally-oriented food using a cooperative model.

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INTRODUCTION

Mission, Vision, & Purpose: Defining the Co-op's Values

The introduction to your operations handbook is significant, and you should consider the chance it will be someone's introduction to your co-op. Whether you are beginning the process of writing your handbook or editing your existing one, take the time to write a brief introduction to your co-op and its inspiration for existence. By creating a document that maintains the mission, value, and purpose of your co-op in your initial stages, you can make sure that the operations and policies you pursue reflect this mandate. You may find that some of your goals seem to be in conflict. For example, it may be difficult to source food ethically, pay your workers, and offer food at an affordable price. Prioritize your values and take this balance into consideration in your decisions. Treating this effort with care and maintaining its relevancy will help keep your current collective in touch with this history and safeguard institutional memory for future generations. And last, but certainly not least, have fun with this document! Let it narrate the story of your cooperative with the personality or voice of your cooperative.

OPERATIONS

Running Your Cooperative Business

This section outlines the fundamental decisions about how your co-op will run, ranging from schedule logistics to maintaining health, safety, and sanitation standards.

- Schedule Logistics: Creating Schedules that Make Sense for Your Business
- Workforce: Organizing Workers and Volunteers
- Food: From Sourcing to Pricing
- Health, Safety, Sanitation: Keeping Your Co-op Safe and Responsible
- Financial Management: Keeping the Co-op Viable
- Publicity: Making Your Co-op a Campus Name

This is the first place where you will have the opportunity to breathe life into your business by making plans regarding its operations. The task is a heavy one, and this outline aims to help you in covering all the considerations necessary to make your co-op a thriving campus presence.

Schedule Logistics: Creating Schedules that Make Sense for Your Business

It's time to decide when you will be open and when you will be closed. Scheduling encompasses not only the day-to-day operations of your store, but also your annual calendar and how you choose to approach summer and winter terms when the majority of your campus may be absent. Be both knowledgeable of what is profitable for your co-op and mindful of your capabilities to meet campus demand. Taking these considerations into account will ensure that your schedule is an advantage, rather than an obstacle, to your co-op's success.

Daily Schedule

The first step in creating a daily schedule is choosing hours of operation that align with your business model and accommodate your labor capacity and then designating shifts, like opening, lunch rush, and

closing shifts. Make sure that the hours you choose take into account your school's class schedule when determining when these shifts will begin and end to account for your student workers' own course schedules. Think also about having "off hours" in the middle of the day, for example, post-lunch and pre-dinner. Decide on tasks that make sense for each shift and create checklists that highlight what each shift is responsible for, whether that be cooking the day's hot meal or closing the kitchen according to health code.

However you choose to approach it, make sure to incorporate store-wide cleaning into your schedule. Keeping all aspects of your kitchen and storefront to health code is essential and can be a large task. This goes beyond the cleaning of a closing shift. After compiling a detailed and comprehensive checklist, decide as a collective how to tackle this cleaning. Whether you choose to spread it out over the course of the week, with different daily shifts responsible for particular items, or delegate this cleaning to a day with otherwise slow business as some co-ops have chosen to do, make sure you are accounting for all the items necessary to keep your co-op a clean and safe working environment.

Next, using all the checklists that you have created as a guide, work together to establish a distinction between "on-shift work" and off-shift work. Making this distinction can be especially important if you are paying your workers so that there is a defined and collectively agreed-upon line of what work is compensated, what work is volunteered, etc. The distinction also serves to keep shift workers on task and more accountable for the responsibilities of their shift. This does not mean that off-shift tasks, like researching a supplier or analyzing finances, are less important; it merely ensures that the workers are attentive to and responsible for the co-op's operations while they are on shift and allows your collective to address compensating off-shift work separately.

When it comes to filling the shifts you have created, decide how your workers will sign up for or be assigned shifts. At the beginning of the semester, workers at the Maryland Food Collective create a schedule and pass it around in a circle, signing up for 5 hours at a time until the schedule is complete. Other co-ops, like Earthfoods for example, delegate the responsibility to a Scheduling committee or individual and create their schedule by having workers submit their availabilities and shift preferences. Having a procedure for this process and for addressing how to approach gaps in the schedule, like when a student worker is compelled to drop a shift for academic reasons, will help minimize interference with your co-op's operations.

Weekly and Monthly Calendar

Approach times when business may be slow responsibly. For many student co-ops, the weekends are a particularly slow time. Some choose not to open on Saturday and/or Sunday, and this can be a smart move in reducing the cost of staying open and paying staff when there is no money to be made; however, you can also choose to approach this time as an opportunity to create a "processing shift", where workers prepare items for the upcoming week, while still reducing the number of staff you schedule on shift and potentially being open fewer hours. Since the kitchen will be more available over the weekend, consider how you can put this availability to good use- whether that be through preparation of items to sell during the week or opening it to the campus community and hosting cooking classes. Make the most of your space!

Business is also often slower as terms come to a close, particularly when students begin studying for finals and moving out. If possible, it will serve you well to be flexible during this period. Some co-ops close prior to the end of the semester to account for this. If you choose to stay open, consider reducing your store hours and brainstorm ways in which you can accommodate the changing schedules of your workforce while they take finals.

Annual Calendar

Inevitably, you will experience the most business during the semesters when the majority of students are on campus, and you will likely find that it isn't profitable for you to remain open when school is not in session because your customer base and workforce are significantly diminished.

Key Concern: Addressing Summer and Winter Terms

- **Alternate Approach: Organizing a Shutdown and Start-up Process**
Many student co-ops opt to close for summer and winter terms. With this decision comes the heavy responsibility of making sure that your co-op is shutdown thoroughly and that the start-up process is well thought-out and easy to execute. An incomplete shutdown can lead to pest problems or other issues that can affect your ability to operate in coming terms, and you'll want to streamline the start-up process to make sure your co-op is ready for business when students return to campus. Much like your approach to your daily schedule, create checklists for shutdown and start-up procedure and decide how you will facilitate them. Mixed Nuts begins its shutdown 2-3 weeks before the end of the semester and has an entire committee responsible for its facilitation to ensure it is performed efficiently and completely. Similarly, its start-up committee is active prior to the beginning of the semester to guarantee that a thorough cleaning is organized and the first large orders are made. If you opt to spread this responsibility across your collective, make sure that tasks are clear and communication is open.
- **Alternate Approach: Open for Business**
The Maryland Food Collective stays open during the summer and winter terms when classes are in session. If you're thinking about pursuing this option, do your research first. Do you have a strong enough customer base during these terms to meet the cost of staying open? Is enough of your workforce on campus? Your suppliers likely have minimum for you to place orders- will you be able to meet them? Deciding to stay open on a college campus when the majority of students are absent means operating significantly leaner. The Maryland Food Collective reduces its store hours over the summer and makes cuts to the number of workers required on shift as well. If you're able to commit to summer and winter operations, make sure you make the needed adjustments to your hours of operation, workforce, and purchasing to keep yourself financially secure.
- **Alternate Approach: Alternative business operations**
Your primary co-op operations might not make sense in the off-season, but there are plenty of other options to keep your group active and make good use of your space! Consider experimenting with catering efforts, offering cooking classes or running programs with youth on campus or in local grade schools, running workshops or simply carrying out value-added food processing such as canning, pickling, fermenting, sprouting grains – the list is endless! Many groups have a wide diversity of activities that boosts their core operations, and you can consider your off-season as room to boost that component of your programming.

Workforce: Organizing Workers and Volunteers

Now that you have established your hours of operation, you need to give thought to how you will operate- in this case, how you will organize and manage your workforce in filling all the tasks that your business requires. Your decision will include many factors, including the nature of your business and its roles, size and scope of your operations, workforce composition - are you largely worker or volunteer-run? - and the mission your collective set forth. You will need to decide how you will address on-shift and off-shift organization and your co-op's approach to structure at-large.

On-Shift

In order to shape the organization of your on-shift staff, use the shift checklists you created to outline common roles according to shift needs, i.e. cooking, front-of-house, volunteer-coordinating. Next, take

into account your co-op's structure. If you decide to be worker-run, will your workforce be trained in all tasks? If you are volunteer-run, how will you address the need for a manager or alternative to one?

Key Concern: Who's Trained and Do I Have a Supervisor?

To operate smoothly, decide how and which individuals will be trained in accordance with your co-op's capabilities and structure.

- Alternate Approach: Shift Leaders
Agora is a 100% volunteer-run operation that specializes in the sale of store-made soups and quiches. While all volunteers are acquainted with the components of each shift through its volunteer handbook, shift leaders are responsible for delegating tasks and making sure all activities are complete. This model is especially effective for workforces with varying degrees of experience.
- Alternate Approach: Working Groups
At the Flaming Eggplant, the café is worker-run, but roles in operating the store are broken down into working groups, which are composed of workers who share the same role (front-of-house/cashier, cook, etc). With this approach, each worker on shift is responsible for and an expert in a particular area of the shift, which diminishes the need for an overall supervisor. The model is also particularly effective when it comes to continuity in training, since each working group is responsible for making sure its members are up to speed.
- Alternate Approach: Worker/Manager
The Maryland Food Collective is worker-run and operates under the principle that all workers must fulfill the capacity of both shift worker and manager while on shift. Thus, any worker on shift is responsible for knowing all aspects of the shift and being able to delegate work to any students who are volunteering accordingly. This model is effective in making sure knowledge is largely shared and thus safeguards against the knowledge lost when an individual leaves the collective; however, it also places a heavy onus on the training of all workers both before and upon hire.

Off-shift

Off-shift work can be likened to the behind-the-scenes efforts that make daily operations possible. This can include menu planning, financial management, and marketing among other things. Because making sure this work gets done is integral, you will need to decide how you will organize or incentivize this work.

Key Concern: Managing Off-Shift Work

Encouraging workers to participate in the behind-the-scenes activity that allows your co-op to stay in business is a serious task, and you should consider whether you want to build participation into your co-op's structure as a requirement or find another means to rally your workers.

- Alternate Approach: Structural Requirements
Because this is necessary work, many student co-ops opt to incorporate these responsibilities into their structure, designing committees to address areas that need attention. Students explain that this structure helps increase accountability and easily integrate new workers into the fold. Earthfoods operates under a committee structure, requiring each of its 23 workers to serve on 3 of their 18 committees, among which include: Payroll, Cash-Handling, Book-keeping, Menu, Dry Goods, Fresh, Maintenance, Human Resources, Scheduling, Handbook, Advertising, and more. Each committee has a delineated purpose and responsibilities and a minimum number of workers necessary for handling the group's goals. If you choose to pursue this route, make sure that you also envision a process for the training of new members to guard against the knowledge lost when students leave the co-op.
- Alternate Approach: Incentives

If you choose not to pursue committee structure, you will have to find a way to incentivize this work. The Maryland Food Collective introduced compensated coordinator positions to address this need. Individuals are voted into these positions on a rolling basis, which allows workers to maintain their own level of involvement in the store's operations and pursue areas that interest them; however, because it is not required that positions be filled, the approach can lead to gaps in areas that need attention. Following a coordinator system also magnifies the need for an individual to train a replacement before leaving, and it would be wise to design a quitting policy that facilitates this process, which will be discussed further in the policy section. Though it may be obvious, pursuing financial incentives also requires that this additional compensation be within your budget. If money is tight, you can try pursuing alternatives, like food credit, which are less of an expense.

Composition

Your decision regarding the structuring of off-shift work will likely stem from how you choose to organize your collective, which includes its composition. Consider whether all workers will be students. A lot of student co-ops employ strictly students, but the Flaming Eggplant and Maryland Food Collective have both chosen to incorporate non-student employees. In the Flaming Eggplant's case, students made the decision to hire a full-time non-student staff coordinator who is responsible for overseeing, though not directing, the co-op's operations and representing the store in communications with university administration. Students have voiced that the staff coordinator, who is hired by the students, has been an awesome resource in maintaining institutional memory. Meanwhile, the Maryland Food Collective chose long ago to hire both student and non-student workers and, as a result, is run by workers as young as 18 and old as 65. Workers there attest that this aspect of the business helps the collective feel more engaged with the community at-large.

Compensation

When deciding whom you will employ, the issue of compensation will quickly arise. Think critically about your mission and values, as well as the capacity of your organization and what your co-op can afford. Co-ops that prioritize workers' rights and quality of life are more likely to make sure their workers earn a wage for their labor, but you need to make sure that you define what work is paid and incorporate your decision into the pricing of your products. In contrast, co-ops that value providing ethically sourced food at an affordable price sometimes structure themselves as volunteer operations to waive the labor cost associated with operating.

Key Concern: Deciding How to Compensate

Student co-ops currently implement a variety of methods to reimburse members for their labor. Note that some co-ops may find it easiest to link off-shift work to shift work to ensure commitments, and that certain roles and responsibilities among certain staff may involve a greater balance of off-shift work (for example, a sourcing coordinator) which may require appropriately different levels of compensation.

- Alternate Approach: Monetary, Hourly or Salaried
In addition to their food credit policies, the Flaming Eggplant and Maryland Food Collective also budget for monetary compensation of their staff. For the Maryland Food Collective, this stems from a commitment to work quality of life and aspirations to pay workers a living wage. Currently, workers are compensated an hourly wage for on-shift and certain forms of off-shift work. Because off-shift work is harder to oversee, make sure that you create a system for holding workers accountable for off-shift work that seek reimbursement for. The Flaming Eggplant also pays its workers an hourly wage and, in addition, budgets for the salary of its full-time staff advisor.
- Alternate Approach: Discount
Mixed Nuts and Sprouts incorporate a store discount to encourage membership and volunteer participation. Sprouts grants a 25% off discount to all volunteers, and Mixed Nuts rewards membership through discounts on bulk-buying. Both approaches are successful in incentivizing involvement with the co-op for individuals interested in what it carries.

- Alternate Approach: Food Credit
The Flaming Eggplant and Maryland Food Collective both use food credit as a means to compensate workers. For the Flaming Eggplant, shift workers earn a free meal at the end of their shift. At the Maryland Food Collective, a \$7/hr food credit wage is employed to compensate volunteers outside the core workforce and incentivize off-shift work. Food credit can be a smart financial approach to compensation because it costs the business less than an hourly wage since recipients are purchasing products with the store mark-up.

Whatever form of reimbursement your co-op pursues, make sure that the funding, whether that comes from pricing mark-ups or a strategy that includes university support, exists to make your choice financially responsible. Once you're certain that funding is available, create clear guidelines that dictate what work is compensated and how to maintain accountability in this process.

Food: From Sourcing to Pricing

As students organizing a food co-op, you may have been motivated by the desire to provide community-oriented, ethically-sourced food to your campus, and here is where you have the opportunity to make good on that vision. Based on the business model you have chosen to pursue, whether that be a café, deli, or grocery co-op, you'll want to spend time creating a menu or directory of the items you'll be offering. This planning stage can and should be influenced by your mission and values, particularly if you want to cater your offerings toward what is regionally-available.

From here you can begin sourcing, making sure to adhere to any purchasing policies that your collective devises. Some co-ops delegate this work to a committee; in the Maryland Food Collective, all workers are required to have at least one order and are responsible for payment and maintaining relations with the vendor. Whichever you pursue, make sure that responsibilities regarding placing orders, stocking, and payment are clear and accounted for.

With products in your store, decide how you are going to price these items. Whether it's an ordered product or something that is cooked on-site, the significance in appropriately pricing items cannot be overstated. Your prices should include the cost of goods sold, labor cost, rent, utilities, insurance, supplies, and your desired profit margin. This equation will vary based on the nature of your co-op. A volunteer-run operation can forego labor costs, while a co-op with university funding may be able to secure a space with no rent. If your collective is lacking in experience here, CoFED has a lot to offer in regard to workshops specifically designed to address pricing, sales, and margins. Get in touch with your Regional Organizer if you think this could benefit you. In the meantime, establishing a clear and transparent pricing policy will help in facilitating operations and evaluating whether your prices match the financial demands of your business.

Creating a financial plan

Key Concern: Understanding "Break-even" Scenarios.

Break even is the point at which you're total sales and other revenue exceeds your total expenses. There is a (relatively) simple way to calculate this reliably, but it requires diligence and patience.

First, We break expenses into two categories: fixed costs and variable costs.

A fixed cost is one that does not increase depending on how much food you sell. This includes rent, utilities and probably labor costs. We will call this “overhead”.

A variable cost is one that increases as you sell more. For most businesses, this is equivalent to the cost of goods sold (CoGS). Typically, a business calculates CoGS as a percentage of sales, that means, if you sell produce for \$3.00 and it costs you \$2.00, the CoGS is %66.

CoGS = Sales price / Amount it costs you

The flip, or inverse of CoGS is called your “margin”, which can also be calculated as a percentage. The margin is the amount of money you have left over to spend on overhead after you’ve payed for the goods. In the above case, the margin would be %33 percent.

Margin = %100 - (Sales price / Amount it costs you)

The equation for your break-even scenario is:

*Total Sales * Margin = Overhead*

For example.....let’s say we are opening a grocery store and we have to pay \$1,000 in rent every month. That is our only overhead. Let’s say that we know that our students will spend \$100 at the store every day and that we are open 20 days a month.

Total sales = \$2,000

Overhead = \$1,000

To stay afloat, how much would you have to charge for an apple if it cost the store \$1?

Health, Safety, & Sanitation: Keeping Your Co-op Safe and Responsible

If you do not keep your co-op operating according to your state’s health code, you won’t be operating very long. Research your state’s rules and regulations and begin the process of incorporating them into your business. Below are some of the concerns that you will need to address, but keep in mind, this is not intended to be comprehensive and your first course of action should be acquainting yourself with your state’s laws.

Certification for Individuals

A universal requirement in the food service industry is that one food service-certified person be present in the kitchen at all times. You can fulfill this requirement by enrolling in a ServSafe course, a food safety training and certification program administered by the National Restaurant Association. Your decision about who is required to take this course should align with the nature of your co-op. At Agora, because the volunteer workforce is more flexible and there is a designated shift leader, certification is required for individuals who wish to be shift leaders. At the Flaming Eggplant, because the co-op is non-hierarchical, all workers are required to obtain a state Food and Beverage Service Worker’s permit within two weeks of their hire.

Permits and Licenses

You will also want to research the necessary permits and licenses necessary for operating on your campus. Each state has slightly different laws and standards, so it is in your best interest to work directly

with your state's food safety department. Keep in mind that your space will need to be inspected and licensed prior to opening.

Inspections

Health inspections will be unannounced, but these evaluations are a bottom line that must be met in order for your co-op to remain open. Decide how you will maintain a state of readiness for this process and establish a protocol for its occurrence, which ought to include certified workers asserting themselves as responsible to the inspector. Incorporate basic health safety into the training of your workforce and include basic food safety practices in your handbook so that members can be clear and informed on how to operate safely.

Financial Management: Keeping the Co-op Viable

A strong mission can set your co-op apart on campus and galvanize your workforce; however, there's no mission without attention to margins. In other words, your ability to operate on your campus and realize your mission is directly related to your commitment to responsible financial management. Here your handbook can be an excellent resource in documenting your processes, making the training and involvement of more members of your collective a strong possibility.

Managing Your Money

When it comes to money management, the first thing you ought to do is streamline your process for creating a budget. Consider both month-to-month and annual operations in your projections. If you need help constructing a budget, solicit help from experts willing to advise you, outside consultants, or a CoFED Regional Organizer. Having a budget will give you a clear sense of what your co-op can manage- what products it can pursue, what policies it can implement etc.

Daily operations create another responsibility, the tracking and coordination of your revenue. Here keeping strong records is essential, and it will benefit you to decide whether you will designate this work to a committee or a few individuals. Create procedure to track sales and pay invoices, manage your bank account, and organize taxes and insurance payments. When it comes to making payments, having an informed perspective of your financials is essential to ensure you are operating with what you have. If your co-op has or will have a payroll, make sure that this process overlaps with oversight in the bank account to ensure that the money is in your account.

Key Concern: Ensuring Accountability

The management of your co-op's finances is a large responsibility and requires a lot of trust. To protect your co-op from financial mismanagement- intentional or not- create safeguards to spread this responsibility and under more than one individual's supervision.

- **Potential Approach: Group Management**
Both due to the scale of managing finances and the power that comes with it, draft multiple individuals to coordinate this process and create checks to safeguard your collective from misconduct or mistakes. Whether you incorporate a committee (or several) with individuals that can serve as checks on one another or simply ensure that multiple individuals are involved in the process, spreading the responsibility will be a benefit to your collective.
- **Potential Approach: Financial Reporting**
Another way to ensure accountability is through financial reporting to the collective. For many student co-ops, this means including financial updates in collective meetings. Determine how you will keep your members involved in your financial management.

Establishing Transparency

Your financial knowledge can and should influence the decisions you make for your business, so it is imperative that you take steps to make financial information as transparent as possible for your collective.

Key Concern: Keeping the Collective Financially Informed

These are some approaches for communicating your financial standing to your collective, but they are by no means exhaustive. The decisions that your collective makes likely have a financial impact; therefore, it is important that they have some basic financial knowledge.

Potential Approach: Financial Reporting

In addition to the explanation that accompanied the key concern addressing accountability, financial reporting to the collective also helps to keep members informed and creates better decision-makers in the process. This can include making customized reports and using your analyses to make recommendations to your members. It is important that financial performance is presented regularly at meetings, and that everyone in a collective goes through the financial planning process every year and has a shared vocabulary to understand and discuss financial matters.

■ Potential Approach: Omnipresence

Continue the education of your collective by making financial considerations omnipresent. In addition to updates, make sure that your co-op's financial standing is accounted for in group decisions involving policy and procedure, and use your knowledge to help other members' efforts, like menu planning and pricing.

Publicity: Making Your Co-op a Campus Name

Marketing your co-op and generating publicity on campus is an area with more flexibility that can be a huge source of untapped growth. Use advertising to educate the campus community about your work as a student-run food collective and bring new customers into your store. Beyond flyer-ing and other grassroots activities, look into the start-up and maintenance of a co-op website and take advantage of other social media outlets that can bring students into your store, like a twitter feed that posts your daily specials. Once you have an established customer base, you can consider pursuing branding- maybe t-shirts or refill-able water bottles!- that can further function to spread your name on campus. The possibilities are really endless in this field; if your campus has a marketing director for student activities, reach out to see if there is room for collaboration and learn more about how you can use marketing to grow your business. You can also reach out to your CoFED Regional Organizer who has numerous resources on how to build advertising campaigns on your campus and is ready for the opportunity to help.

POLICY

Managing the Collective & Keeping Its Commitments

This section will provide guidance on how to create policies governing the management of your workforce, structuring of operations, and maintenance of store principles to preserve the direction and viability of your co-op.

- Workforce: Managing Your Collective from Induction to Departure
- Values: Maintaining the Co-op's Commitments

The process of drafting and implementing policy is an important exercise for your co-op in learning what best suits the needs of your store and its members. Below, you will find important policy considerations that will provide you with a firm foundation to build on as you move forward and continue to address the issues you deem relevant to your collective and campus community. Expect this section to grow with your co-op. Understand the formation and integration of these policies as an opportunity to manage activities more efficiently, maintain accountability to the commitments, or values, you have set forth, and ease points of transition and conflict through generations of your co-op.

Workforce: Managing Your Collective from Induction to Departure

Drafting policy to establish your procedures regarding the hiring, training, management, and termination of members can be a huge aid in taking on these large endeavors and bringing credibility to tough decisions. This section is designed to guide you through the process and help your collective harness the potential of all its members.

Hiring: Recruiting and vetting applicants

The welcoming of new individuals into the fold is a significant process for any collective. The individuals you elect to work alongside you will have an equal stake and voice in your co-op, and you want to ensure that they are capable of serving as stewards of its values and operating responsibly in an environment with less traditional supervision. But before you can incorporate new members, you need to create the hiring policies that will govern the decision-making process.

Key Concern: Who Decides?

When drafting your hiring policy, first address whether you will involve your entire collective or a smaller body of individuals.

- **Alternate Approach: Collective Decision**
The Maryland Food Collective employs a collective-wide vote for the new hire of members. Worker-owners explain that the input of all members is crucial to their co-op due to their uniformly linear governing structure. As a non-hierarchical co-op, new and seasoned members alike will have equal voting power and responsibilities; therefore, the input of all current members is seen as essential in their hiring process. The method can be less efficient and more time-intensive for the group than a committee process because it requires frequent conversation about when and how many to hire, how to advertise, and which candidates to consider.
- **Alternate Approach: Committee Process**
Delegating hiring to a committee, as Earthfoods does with its Hiring Committee, allows for a much more streamlined process with a more clear designation of responsibilities for publicizing employment opportunities, conducting interviews, and bringing new members into the collective. Because of the power inherent to this position to make decisions about the composition of the cooperative, some students encourage the delegation of hiring and firing activities to separate committees and the maintenance of term limits for such a position to keep more collective members involved in the process.

Next you'll want to create a hiring application and/or a careful interview process. Some co-ops require additional commitments from applicants, like volunteering in the store for a particular number of hours or attending a collective meeting, before one can be hired. When interviewing, engage as best you can and try to imagine how the applicant can fill a gap in your co-op. Never forget to consider what your collective needs- whether that be a passionate advocate for slow food or a smart go-getter to help draft a yearly budget- and recruit accordingly!

Finally, devise a system to evaluate candidates and a transparent voting process for the members responsible to make their decision. If you choose to operate within a committee structure, this includes creating rules about how individuals will join committees. As your collective grows, you will likely find it necessary to design a consistent election process. When doing so, remember to take into account when the elections will take place, whom can be considered, who is involved in the decision, and how the decision is ultimately made when writing your policy.

Training: Integrating New Workers Into the Co-op

With individuals hired and ready to step up as a member of your cooperative, it is your responsibility to make sure that you provide the necessary training to make them feel comfortable and integrated, while also communicating the store's experience in a way that mitigates the loss of institutional memory as seasoned students leave and new faces arrive.

Take on the heavy task of consolidating the knowledge that is necessary to participate in your collective into a realistic training process, or orientation. Many student co-ops, like Earthfoods and the Flaming Eggplant, delegate this work to a Training Committee who hosts week-long orientations for new workers after a hiring session. These sessions serve as a comprehensive introduction to both shift work in the store, like kitchen or cashier training, and work within a cooperative enterprise with skill-shares and workshops related to meetings and collective principles. Keep in mind; this is where your handbook can become a huge asset as a central source for learning and reference.

Key Concern: How are Orientations Organized?

To facilitate the really essential process of training new members, it is wise to establish when these trainings will be and who is responsible for organizing and conducting them.

- Alternate Approach: Collective Process
Students at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) host training days every Friday after a new hiring session. They close the store and the members who have volunteered to assist with the training give a detailed walkthrough of the various aspects of the store, ranging from managing the storefront, to working in the kitchen, to organizing the office. They also distribute their handbook, written as a training resource, to ease the process for new members.
- Alternate Approach: Committee Initiative
For Earthfoods and the Flaming Eggplant, training new members falls to the responsibility of a committee. At Earthfoods, the Training Committee provides a training checklist for new hires, oversees the completion of one week of paid shadow hours, and encourages attendance at committee meetings. At the Flaming Eggplant, training for new members falls to the Office Committee. Its process also includes shadow shifts within the first week of hiring; however, the co-op also takes the need for re-training of all members into consideration and therefore hosts yearly re-trainings for the entire collective.
- Alternate Approach: Coordinator(s) or Manager(s)
For the Berkeley Student Food Collective, operations are managed by a designated, compensation Operations Manager who is responsible for training new staff and volunteers. Consider creating a position and a group structure to facilitate individual and group trainings.

Skill-building: Improving the Co-op's Workforce Over Time

Training new members is essential to integrating them in your collective and operating smoothly; however, remember that there is always room for growth and further education among the entire collective. Consider how your co-op can incorporate skill-building in particular areas, which can range from facilitation, to kitchen management, anti-oppression, and cooperative theory. You can hold designated workshops at weekly meetings, build on accumulated knowledge at retreats, or incorporate committees that can act as resources. Whatever you decide, steps taken to extend the learning process for your collective will create a more motivated and capable group and safeguard institutional memory.

Accountability & Evaluation: Maintaining and Enforcing Work Standards

Maintaining an accountable workforce is what will decide the long-term success of your co-op; however, because student co-ops tend to be less or non-hierarchical, tracking accountability is often an unconventional process. That being said, collective approaches are possible, and you can benefit from the wealth of tactics employed by fellow student co-ops as well as harness your collective's creativity by devising your own. After deciding what works best for your group, don't underestimate the value of drafting policy around the process. Confronting fellow workers about meeting standards and improving their quality of work can be a daunting and sensitive issue; here a policy or operations handbook can be a major asset in holding members accountable to collectively agreed upon terms.

Key Concern: Adopting Methods for Reviewing and Criticizing Quality of Work

When crafting your own measures of accountability, brainstorm how members will be held accountable on a regular basis and how infractions will be mediated.

- Alternate Approach: Review Process

The Maryland Food Collective created a system of reviews to address worker accountability. Reviews are a 2-week period during which an individual must seek out all members of the collective to discuss their performance, receive critical feedback, and take steps toward improvement. At the end of the review period, the entire collective votes on whether to retain the individual, fire them, or extend their review for another two weeks. Workers can be put on review at any time for any reason- including repeated latenesses, missed meetings, or neglected responsibilities. If a worker has not been on review for an entire year, they are automatically put on review to evaluate their overall performance. The philosophy behind this process is to maintain accountability in a non-hierarchical workplace belie the significance of constructive feedback among workers as an alternative to top-down management.

- Alternate Approach: Individual Contracts

For Earthfoods, the Human Resources Committee oversees the performance- both positive and lacking- among the collective. Members are given "fruits" as rewards for excellent performance, which can translate into food credit in the store, and "bugs" to denote failure to meet responsibilities, which can lead to termination. If members accrue a particular number of bugs, they are required to meet with the HR Committee to draft an individual contract that will facilitate self-motivated action and resolution between the individual and collective. Failure to meet the terms and deadline for a contract can result in termination. This system of contracts is designed to address issues in member accountability by treating members as individuals and crafting personal solutions for members to remedy their actions. Like the Maryland Food Collective's annual reviews, Earthfoods and the Flaming Eggplant also institute semester evaluations to check-in with everyone's progress.

Your approach to protecting standards for shift work will help your co-op function in day-to-day operations, but it is also important to include the oversight of off-shift work in your policies. For this reason, many co-ops prioritize the inclusion of individual or committee reports at collective meetings to update the group.

Termination: Leaving the Co-op

Drafting policy about how to handle the exit of a member of your co-op can facilitate both the process of termination and the fallout from loss of labor. Whether the result of removal or resignation, the departure of any member of your co-op will pose a loss to your collective's institutional memory, and it is important to recognize this and create methods to mediate it.

If it becomes necessary to remove an individual due to poor performance, the first step to creating a termination policy is making it answerable to your methods of tracking accountability. For this reason, firing at the Maryland Food Collective is the result of a collective vote after an unsatisfactory review process, and Earthfoods delegates this task to its HR Committee, in which failure to meet the terms of a

contract or a series of formal complaints can lead to termination. Deciding how your co-op will handle this process now will lend credibility to your decisions should the need to remove an individual ever arise.

Mediating the resignation of an individual, upon graduation or deciding to study abroad, for example, may seem less serious than termination, but in fact requires real attention to make sure your co-op addresses the loss of labor and knowledge of that member.

Key Concern: Creating Exit Requirements

When an individual makes the decision to exit the co-op voluntarily, your collective can benefit from having measures in place to maintain smooth operations and transfer knowledge.

- Alternate Approach: Notice Periods
Many student co-ops institute notice periods to allow the collective to address the loss of a member. Typically two weeks, the notice period allows remaining members to take on the individual's vacant shifts and address a labor shortage through hiring if necessary. It can also ensure that members in leadership positions spend time training their replacements before leaving.
- Alternate Approach: Facilitate a Training
To guarantee this training, look into additional structural means your co-op can pursue. Hiring before a member's departure and finding replacements to fulfill their on and off-shift responsibilities allows for easier communication and more hands-on training. Making requirements for this process, or incentivizing it, if necessary, can also facilitate this transfer of experience.
- Alternate Approach: Shadowing
One way to ensure transmission of knowledge and experience is for the incoming individual to shadow the current or outgoing individual(s), observing them in their routines, asking questions about activities or larger context, and practicing the tasks with early supervision.
- Alternate Approach: Exit Statements
Departing members can write exit statements as a means to record their experience with the collective, leave lessons learned, and propose ideas that they think will benefit the remaining and future collective. These documents can be a resource in maintaining institutional memory and ongoing relationships with former workers.

Values: Maintaining the Co-op's Commitments

A final, but by no means subordinate, consideration in your policy-making process is the maintaining of your co-op's store values. Many student food co-ops are born out of real concerns about food politics, sustainability, and cooperative management, and the creation of reflective policy can keep your co-op accountable to its mission, values, and principles in the short and long-term. Below, you'll find information regarding typical policy tools that most student co-ops employ in this process.

Inventory: Carrying Products That Reflect Your Philosophy

Your co-op embodies its values on a daily basis through the items you choose to make and stock. Earthfoods is committed to providing vegetarian food at an affordable price, and its menu reflects this mandate. While not a strictly vegan or vegetarian co-op, the Maryland Food Collective guarantees that its hot meal is always vegan with a protein source and also has policies in place that bar the carrying of products with high fructose corn syrup or artificial flavors. Portland State University created a very thorough food criteria policy that helps facilitate ordering that is in line with the collective's wishes. Work with your collective to draft your own policy. In this way, whether ordering falls to the responsibility of a committee of individuals or is spread across the co-op, your inventory will remain a reflection of your philosophy.

Pricing: Using Prices as Incentives

Another way in which student co-ops institutionalize their values is the use of pricing incentives. When it comes to items that align with their mission, like local or organic food, you can choose to sell these items at a lower mark-up to encourage customers to support them. Kresge's pricing policy creates a pricing hierarchy that privileges items that are both local and organic over items that are either local or organic and charges a higher mark-up on items that are neither. In this vein, some co-ops, like the Maryland Food Collective, might use pricing as a deterrent; the co-op allocates a higher mark-up to non-vegan items on its sandwich line in order to promote vegan options. If your co-op chooses to approach pricing in this way, however, exercise caution. Be sure that your incentives are financially responsible and your mark-ups satisfy the cost of obtaining, stocking and/or serving these items.

Governance: Employing Cooperative Principles

Finally, in addition to the composition and pricing of your inventory, you can communicate your store's values in the way you operate on a daily basis. Cooperative principles involve democracy, open membership, non-discrimination, and concern for community among others. Foster a cooperative atmosphere by creating policies that reflect these principles in your governance structure.

Key Concern: Is everyone on board?

Before drafting value-based policy, however, make sure you know what the members who make up your collective truly value.

- Potential Approach: Vision Meeting

Vision meetings are an opportunity for your collective to reassess and restate its mission and values. Consider holding a vision meeting at least once a year so that your members can get perspective on what its goals are and how it would like to pursue them.

GOVERNANCE

Making Decisions and Managing the Progress of the Co-op

This section will provide guidance on how to run meetings, structure voting power, and create a co-op model that protects institutional memory. It will also explore how some co-ops have widened their governance structure to better serve their interests and protect their viability.

- Meetings: Making Decisions and Keeping the Organization Informed
- Voting: Determining the Power Structure of the Co-op
- Widening Your Circle: Designing a Governance Structure to Serve Your Co-op
- Institutional Memory: Maintaining the Co-op's History

Students operating food co-ops across North America have adopted diverse and unique approaches to governance and directing their businesses. When choosing how your co-op will address these issues, consider what some of your group's main concerns are so that you can be sure to create a structure that answers to them. Your decisions will affect everything from the composition and hierarchy (or lack thereof) of your collective to routine processes like meetings and voting. As you will see, the structure that you adopt can be an asset in living your values on an everyday basis while also safeguarding the long-term goals of your co-op.

Meetings: Making Decisions and Keeping the Organization Informed

Meetings are an essential space for making announcements, reporting progress on projects, and proposing new ideas. In the Game Plan, we presented logistics on how to run a meeting and useful roles and responsibilities for doing so. Now it's time for you to design the official procedures that will govern how information flows in your co-op.

When, Where & Who

How you have chosen to operate will likely have a direct influence on who is required in attendance at meetings. Co-ops run by the effort of a core group of individuals often choose to hold weekly, all-staff meetings to discuss the state of the business. Co-ops that run with help from a wider pool of student volunteers, like Agora UBC for example, may not require attendance from workers at all, instead turning to, potentially less frequent, meetings of a board to address issues as they arise and items related to long-term goals.

Once you have decided which model makes the most sense for your co-op, designate a standing time and place to provide a consistent and stable setting.

How to Run a Meeting

Next, you will want to devise procedures for how your meetings will run. Begin by establishing reoccurring roles with defined responsibilities. Here's a review of those discussed in the Game Plan:

- The **Facilitator** keeps the meeting moving and directs responses toward precise topics.
- The **Note-taker** records discussion points, decisions made and tasks assigned for people who are not present and also for later reflection. Consider appointing two note takers; one to record all points of discussion and as much of the meeting as possible; the other to focus on writing down tasks and items that need to be followed up on immediately.
- Create a place to keep meeting notes in an organized way. This could be a website, a wiki, a shared file server or hard drive, a file cabinet or a binder. Consider emailing out meeting notes to all members after every meeting.
- The **Time-keeper** lets everyone know when an agenda item is about to run out of time and forces the group to wrap it up or make a decision to extend time.²

You will also want to introduce the concept of stack and the role of the **Stack-keeper**. Keeping stack is a manner in which individuals are called upon to speak according to the order in which they raised their hands to be "put on stack". This allows a meeting to proceed with less interruption and emphasizes the legitimacy of all members participating. It is within the authority of the stack-keeper to give preference to individuals who may not have spoken.

After deciding on what roles are relevant to your group, create a system for assigning roles, which can be anything from a strict rotation to a volunteer-basis. Regardless of which method you choose, keep in mind that in order to ensure effective meetings, all participants should be aware of their responsibilities and ideally trained in how to facilitate a meeting.

Work out a plan for how meetings will be structured and what will be included. Typical staff meetings include general updates, committee/individual progress reports, and proposals for the collective to consider. Creating a standard meeting outline and order of items will lend itself to easier facilitation. Address how the agenda for the meeting will be put together and how participants will be able to access and add to the agenda prior to the meeting.

Participating in a Meeting

Establishing rules for participation in a meeting is not only essential for a smooth process; it also allows you to ensure that you are managing yourselves cooperatively.

An important principle of the cooperative model, as set out by the Rochdale Principles of 1844, is anti-discrimination and, further, democratic control. Many cooperative organizations, including CoFED, also make it a priority to educate members on anti-oppression methods and train in the art of nonviolent communication. Both of these are invaluable tools, and you can find information to share with your members, or, better yet, contact your Regional Organizer at CoFED to schedule a workshop!

There are more methods for participant contribution that have been developed to help groups communicate in more balanced and democratic ways. Below you'll find explanations of some useful tools provided by Cultivate.coop, an online resource for information on cooperatives, which are employed by many student co-ops and CoFED's own employees.

Direct Response



If a participant has a "direct response" to something that another group member said, they should make the hand motion shown in the above picture (index fingers out, thumbs up, moving hands up and down in opposite directions). The Stack Keeper allows this participant to state their response before the conversation goes on. A "direct response" is only a correction to something that was incorrectly stated by another participant, an answer to a question that another participant had, or that

is so important that it must be said at this moment. A "direct response" is not to be used to respond to a point that someone else just made, to cut in the discussion-line, or to argue against the person who just spoke. Such responses should go in the normal stack line.

Correct Usage: "You asked who volunteered to take over your shift? That was me." OR "Actually, the store spent \$100 dollars yesterday, not \$1,000."

Incorrect Usage: "I disagree with what you just said, because..."

Clarifying Question



Any participant may make the following hand gesture to indicate a "clarifying question." If someone is making this gesture, the Stack Keeper allows them to ask their question before stack goes on. This should only be used in situations when a participant does not understand something that is being said, needs additional information, or if they have a question about the factual accuracy of what is being said. This should not be used in anyway as a response to someone else's statement.

Correct Usage: "Wait, what were our expenses last week?"

Incorrect Usage: "How can you say that when you disagreed with Jeremy's point?"

Point of Process



If a participant feels that the group discussion is not following the correct procedure or a discussion has gotten off topic and could benefit from a reminder about the purpose of an agenda item or the meeting overall, they may make this hand gesture and say out loud "Point of Process." The Stack Keeper allows them to speak before the next person at the top of stack. They must then say how they think the discussion has gotten off topic or is not following procedure.

Correct Usage: "I'm not sure why we're talking about shifts when the agenda says we're supposed to be talking about salaries."

"There's a proposal on the table, and I think we should resolve that before we move on to anything else."³

All together, these considerations should enable you to design a meeting structure that fits your needs. Whatever you choose to pursue, remember to foster a climate that respects your process. Though

intangible, creating a respectful forum where members show respect for one another and the process your group has chosen to operate within is a critical component to functioning cooperatively.

Voting: Determining the Power Structure of the Co-op

Now that you have addressed the forum through which members can make their voice heard, you need to decide how you will aggregate those opinions into action by determining how your members vote. This includes choosing a voting model that suits your needs and considering how you will balance power among your workers, board members, and customers.

Choosing a Decision-Making Model

The two predominant models for making decisions within student co-ops are Majority and Consensus. Majority is a process that many of us are familiar with in which a proposal may succeed if a simple majority, 51 percent of the individuals, favors it. Some co-ops, like the Maryland Food Collective, implement a variation on this structure, known as a supermajority, in which 2/3 of the individuals present must support the proposal. Consensus is a process of decision-making that aims to create a cooperative alternative to traditional hierarchical or Majority processes by making inclusivity and collaboration integral parts of its structure. Under consensus, the goal is to pass a proposal under conditions that all collective members are comfortable with, though perhaps not in full support of.

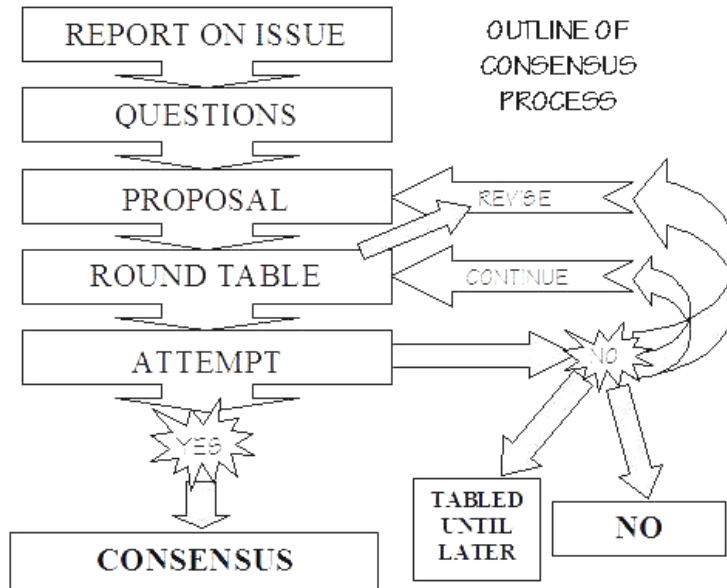
Students who choose to operate under Majority procedure often cite time frame and efficiency as their motivating factor; however, co-ops that choose to use consensus, like Earthfoods and Mixed Nuts, attest to its essential role in facilitating more cooperative group dynamics. Authors of *On Conflict and Consensus*, Butler and Rothstein explain: “In the consensus decision-making process, members of the group need not to each other as competitors, but rather see someone else’s comfort with the decision as integral to their own comfort with the decision. In other words ‘everyone works to improve the proposal to make it the best decision for the group’ and not necessarily any individuals.”⁴

Key Concern: Consenting to Consensus

Part of consenting to consensus is making sure that all of your members are trained in its philosophy and familiar with it as a process. If your co-op is considering using consensus, it is important that you be thorough in making sure that all members are on board. Having only a few members with full command or knowledge of it can very quickly create an unequal playing field and an oppressive dynamic that the process was designed to avoid.

- **Potential Approach: Trainings**

To address this issue, be sure that all participants “consent to consensus” in your meetings and consider inviting a trained guest speaker or CoFED Regional Organizer to present on the issue for your collective. In the meantime, CoFED has materials with very detailed step-by-step guidelines that you can get access to, and you can use this diagram to visualize the process:



No matter the voting model your co-op chooses to implement, something that both Earthfoods, who uses consensus, and the Maryland Food Collective, who votes by majority, agree upon is the need to establish a quorum for voting on important policies. Quorum is the number of voting members necessary to hold a vote on policy. Establishing quorum is a protection against a minority of your members acting without sufficient consent or input from the rest of the collective. Earthfoods requires 2/3 of their members to be in attendance; for the Maryland Food Collective, 4/5 of the worker-owners must be present to vote on important policy. Decide what makes sense for your co-op and abide by it!

Widening Your Circle: Designing a Governance Structure to Serve Your Co-op

You have put in the effort to outline your co-op’s mission, values, and principles; now you can design a governance structure that will support you in achieving these aims. Student co-ops place a lot of emphasis on the students operating the store when it comes to decision-making; however, a lot of student co-ops have also chosen to widen their governance structures to correspond with the value to make their co-op more of a community space or to take advantage of the perspective that additional direction and resources bring to addressing long-term goals. Here is a brief look at the variety of sources of outside support that you can consider to help your co-op meet its vision.

Expansion Through Values

Many co-ops share the value of wanting their co-op to be a source of community for their campus, and one way to address this value is to expand your decision-making structure to incorporate customer input. The Maryland Food Collective strives to do this by holding open meetings where customers are welcome to attend and participate in discussions. If a customer has been to three consecutive meetings, they are also eligible to vote on proposals. The UW Student Food Cooperative takes a different approach that also succeeds in empowering customers to feel like a serious part of the co-op community. If the collective is struggling to come to agreement on a particular issue, they will make the decision to expand the vote to include customers and volunteers to ensure that the most representative decision is made, giving 70% of decision-making power to the workers and drawing on 30% from community input.

Expansion Through Perspective

Student co-ops often struggle with long-term planning due to high turnover as students graduate; therefore, some co-ops also choose to expand their governing structure to include boards or individuals that can help direct or supplement this process.

Providing Advising

Co-ops in need of external support can use advisors to provide expertise or resources and a long-term perspective on operations. As discussed earlier, the Flaming Eggplant employs a staff advisor that serves as a go-between for issues with university administration, while also helping with the retention of institutional memory. Other co-ops sometimes elect a board of advisors made up of campus administrators, faculty, graduate students, and members of regional business associations. If you think this structure could help your co-op, work with your collective to determine what type of expertise you are looking for and devise an election or hiring process to create your board.

Providing Direction

Depending on the operating structure of your co-op, you might decide that your co-op needs more than advising; it needs direction. This is often the case for volunteer-run operations that need a body of individuals beyond the workforce to facilitate long-term planning for the business. If this sounds relevant to your co-op, consider the construction of a board of directors. With this decision, you will need to create different positions with explicitly outlined functions and responsibilities and decide how your co-op's board will be elected, when elections will be held, and who can participate in this process. Sprouts has a board of directors made up of 15 volunteers who are elected to their positions by the general membership at meetings held in March and November.

Key Concern: Who Gets to Decide? Balancing Power

As you can see, student co-ops can vary largely in whom they choose to incorporate into their decision-making structure, and co-ops functioning with a board of directors need to address how they will balance power among workers and board members. Many co-ops want to give workers power over their workplace and might struggle with a smooth way to do so while also following the board's direction.

- **Potential Approach: Establishing Legitimacy**
Mediating the balance of power between a board of directors and workforce is not a simple task, but you can address it by building a board that is held accountable and perceived as legitimate by your workforce and general membership. By taking steps to solicit and weigh member input in board decisions and giving the workforce and membership decision-making power in board elections, you lay the foundations for a more responsive board and a healthier balance of everyone's interests.

Institutional Memory: Maintaining the Co-op's History

One of the most beautiful things about student food cooperatives is their ability to grow and transform through the efforts of new members; however, you want to make sure that your co-op doesn't lose touch with its roots, both in regard to the values and past lessons that brought it to its current state, along the way. The term institutional memory is intended to capture this wealth of knowledge, and it's something that student food co-ops are perpetually struggling with due to frequent turnover as students come and go. Preserving institutional memory creates future co-op generations that appreciate the founder's vision and learn from their experiences. By drawing from how other student food co-ops are addressing this challenge, you can be a step ahead of the curve in smoothing the transition between future generations of your co-op.

Leadership: Transferring Knowledge

The most direct link to the heart and operations of your co-op will always be its members. When workers leave the co-op, make sure their experience doesn't walk out the door with them! Consider ways in which you can facilitate the transfer of knowledge as responsibilities shift within your co-op.

Shadowing

You can set up a process by which members new to a position shadow their predecessor before taking the position on fully.

Committee Materials

If you choose to operate within a structure of committees, you can follow Earthfoods example and ensure that information regarding the process and history of each committee is preserved by requiring each committee to maintain written materials that detail how they operate and record meeting minutes.

Exit Statements

To pay heed to the knowledge that departing members have gained over time, you may consider prompting these individuals to write exit statements, like the folks at the Maryland Food Collective. These documents are essentially a reflection on their experiences and a space for leaving lessons learned and proposing ideas, large or small, that they think might benefit the remaining and future collective. If you deem it necessary, you can discuss the possibility of incentivizing this undertaking for departing members.

Handbooks: Retaining History

Handbooks offer a rich, tangible window into your co-op's history, and they are truly an invaluable tool in maintaining the institutional memory of your collective. If you're in the process of creating your operations handbook now, you're off to a great start in building something that will provide your co-op with much needed clarity and stability in years to come! When it comes to using handbooks as tool to retain history, approach them as a source for inspiration and resolution. Discuss among the collective when you feel it's appropriate to reference your handbook in decision-making, be as familiar with it as possible, and keep it up to date! Earthfoods, which operates under a committee structure, designates one member to fulfill the roles of their Handbook Committee, which requires keeping the document current and distributing copies to members at the beginning of each year. The result is a comprehensive, relevant, and transparent document that is able to serve as a historical resource and contemporary tool should it ever be needed. Make your handbook an asset to your co-op!

Trainings: Sharing Skills

Consider incorporating collective-wide trainings as a means to share skills among your staff and reinforce your co-op's history and values. Weekly meetings can serve as a space to hold workshops, which can be an effective approach to tackling worker and customer education and garnering momentum for improvement. These training workshops can be led by knowledgeable members- or experts within your campus community and beyond! Discuss among your members a way in which you can implement these trainings to keep your co-op consistently engaged with your mission and principles.

Team-Building: Keeping the Co-op United

Student co-ops create alternative work environments whose inclusivity often foster social relationships; however, this can also make division more apparent when conflicts arise. A divided co-op is stifled in operating smoothly and fulfilling its mission, so making co-op unity a priority will be an asset to your collective. You can foster unity by creating opportunities for team-building and cooperation outside store operations. Some co-ops organize retreats or outside worker parties to encourage bonding among members. Consider how you can facilitate this process for your collective. CoFED organizes regional retreats and convergences to help student co-ops grow and share ideas, which can also serve as spaces for your collective to grow closer. Work on getting a team together to represent your co-op at an upcoming event!

PROGRAMMING

Beyond Food: Using Your Space For Other Services

This section will address how your co-op can realize the potential of your space as more than a food enterprise and use it as a site for community development.

- Internal Programming: Making Community Involvement Operational
- External Programming: Unleashing Your Vision Beyond Your Space

Cooperatives often embody the principle of concern for community outlined in the Rochdale Principles, but student co-ops are in an especially influential place to expand on this notion and serve as a place for campus unity and development. Programming with this intent, whether through initiatives targeting education or empowerment, inside or outside your co-op, can help your collective realize its vision as a community space and force. While measuring your community impact might seem like an intangible task, it is worthwhile to take the time to assess your efforts and address areas where your co-op is committed and capable of making a difference.

Internal Programming: Making Community Involvement Operational

The case for cooperatives as business models is extensive, but one aspect that student food co-ops often organize around is the opportunities to incorporate social justice into their operations. Your co-op can engage in movements that are meaningful to your members, campus, and region by using your space as a site for community involvement and action.

Think seriously about the issues that resonate most with your collective and then brainstorm ways in which you can use your store to service them. Passionate about local food? If there's a community garden on your campus, consider a partnership to bring its produce into the co-op. Concerned with student education? Hosting trainings, workshops, or cooking classes are all ways in which your co-op can engage your campus in an educational sense, and there's no limit to how creative you can be! Aside from your own goals, also be willing to cooperate with student groups that approach you (and do your part to seek them out!). The students at Sprouts partnered with other student organizers to create "Community Eats", a free or by donation hot lunch to the UBC community that uses food that might otherwise go to waste and invites conversation on a variety of food systems issues. Whatever your vision holds, use your space as the resource it is and find a way to incorporate it into the fabric of your collective operations.

External Programming: Unleashing Your Vision Beyond Your Space

While your storefront is certainly an asset, never forget that the entire campus is open to you, provided you're willing to put in the effort to engage it. Your campus holds opportunities for increased educational initiatives and meaningful partnerships- take advantage!

Through Education

Universities are at the center of debates concerning global challenges like food justice and cooperative economics, and your co-op needn't stay on the sidelines! One way to forge a presence on your campus is through education both inside and outside the classroom on issues your co-op prioritizes. Doing so allows your members to develop as leaders and participants in meaningful dialogues and prove the value of your co-op to the campus community in facilitating and contributing to important discussions.

Is your University receptive to student ideas for curriculum? Consider taking an institutional approach and using your members' experience working within a food co-op to propose a course! Students can use their leverage and relationships with campus officials to initiate a course on topics related to their interests and mission. Introducing courses is a great way for your co-op to network with passionate students, participate in campus education and the development of student leaders, and contribute to an overall more active student body.

Working with Student Groups

If your university has an active student body, chances are there is a wealth of student groups that you can partner with to advance your vision on campus. One example of a ready ally is the Real Food Challenge. The Real Food Challenge (RFC) is a national campaign with chapters at universities around the United States that aims to help campuses shift \$1 billion of existing university food budgets away from industrial farms and junk food and towards local/community-based, fair, ecologically sound and humane food sources—what it calls “real food”—by 2020⁶. If there's a chapter on your campus, brainstorm ways in which the two of you can support one another, through advertising, fundraisers, or other events- if not, consider using your store as a space to advertise for and solicit interest in the formation of a new chapter. Similarly to partnering with RFC, seek out other student organizations and keep an eye out for ways in which your co-op can be an asset or benefit from other campus groups.

Creating Initiatives

In addition to partnerships, your co-op can play a vital role in inspiring interest and fostering projects on your campus. The students behind Sprouts are models for making your co-op an incubator for new ideas and action that extend beyond your storefront. In addition to managing their “Community Eats” program, they also created a weekly grocery delivery service, “Sprouts Box”, which distributes local, organic produce to campus residents using bikes from a local bike co-op.

References:

1 CoFED Retreat handbook

2 The Game Plan

3 [http://cultivate.coop/wiki/Taking_Stack_\(Meeting_Facilitation_Technique\)](http://cultivate.coop/wiki/Taking_Stack_(Meeting_Facilitation_Technique))

4 Cite CT Butler on conflict and consensus

5 Cite: <http://www.missourimidwivesassociation.org/consensus.html>

6 RFC “What We Do”