

THE SEVEN CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLES – PLAIN LANGUAGE VERSION

The co-op principles are the foundation of co-operatives worldwide. To make them more accessible and easy to understand, we present a [plain-language translation](#) below the official text.

To learn more about the co-op principles and how to practice them in your own organization, download the Ontario Co-operative Association’s FactSheet, “Making the Co-op Principles Work For You” from the Ontario Co-operative Association website www.ontario.coop.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

All Welcome – no pressure

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

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

One member = one vote

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

No free rides

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

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

LEAD, CULTIVATE AND CONNECT

Co-operatives are a *different* kind of business model that are driven by people, planet and profit. The Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA) supports, develops, educates and advocates for Ontario’s 1,500+ co-operative businesses.

Self-control, no parents

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 co-operative autonomy.

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information Share, Learn, Grow

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 Together Everyone Achieves More

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

7th Principle: Concern for Community Building strong communities

While focusing on member needs, co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

- *Adopted in Manchester (UK) 23 September 1995*

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