

COOPERATIVE ORGANIZING LEARNING & GROWTH TOOL

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL:

1. TAKE IT!

This tool is meant to help you and your co-op: be as forthright as possible.

- Take this as an individual: after reading and considering each statement below, fill out a number/assessment that you feel best applies to your co-op (in the left-hand column).
- For any score lower than 4, write an explanation in the notes section.

2. UNIFY IT!

Share your results with your full board (and staff if applicable), discuss where you agree, and where there are different views. Build an agreed-upon list of strongest points and the top area(s) of concern.

- Have the full board circle the areas from all sections that clearly need work.
- Put that list in a new document.
- Rate all items in the new “needs work” list as an A, B, C, or D level of priority.

3. ACTION IT!

What will we do?

- Under all A and B priority items, outline major steps to accomplishment.
- Next to all A and B items, set a target month to accomplish each step.
- Calendar it: take all the steps and put them in a 12-month calendar and use this as your plan to complete them each month!
- Bonus: add the quick and easy priority level C and D items as well.

KEY

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Somewhat agree
- 5 = Agree
- 6 = Strongly agree



I. VISION: Is our vision rooted in community?

	a) Our Co-op has a clear understanding of the stakeholders in our community in our community we want to build power with/meet our mutual needs together (i.e. farmers, refugees, young families, retired community members, low-income families, etc.)
	b) Our Vision was discerned in community, with input from the stakeholders our Co-op will be built to serve AND the Vision addresses the needs they desire to address in our community. Our vision is (and feels like) a COLLECTIVE vision.
	c) Our Core Values and Mission were developed/solidified with an input process with our member-owners.
	d) We have spent sufficient time this past year getting broad community feedback about the Vision, Mission, and direction of our Co-op.
	e) We have a process to invite feedback from our stakeholders on our Vision.
	f) Our Co-op's leadership has a clear understanding of the Co-operative Identity, and a commitment to the Co-operative Values and Principles.
Notes:	

II. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP: Is our leadership rooted in community?

	a) Our Co-op's leadership reflects who the co-op is being built to serve and build power with, with attention to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
	b) Whether or not the store opens, I believe our Co-op has built up leaders and broad leadership capacity in our community.
	c) I believe, overall, our founding member-owners and other community members trust our Co-op's leadership team and feel invited to be part of the Co-op.
	d) Whether or not the store opens, I believe our Co-op has nourished and enriched our community throughout its organizing.
Notes:	

III. PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP: Who's building this Co-op? *(Hint: not just you!)*

	a) Our membership numbers have grown solidly over the past year, reflecting support for our Co-op's vision and purpose.
	b) Our classes, events, Annual Meetings, etc. have had solid participation from more than one small sub-group of our membership.
	c) It is easy for someone to find out about and participate in the organizing and leadership of our Co-op.
	d) Our member-owners and community members know that we are a resource for issues related to the local food system, food access, and building an inclusive economy.
	e) Local farmers and producers reach out to us about their needs and give updates about how they are doing and how the Co-op can help support them.
	f) We have done a good job reaching a large % of our community, across demographics and with consideration of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.
	g) We actively educate co-op members about the Co-operative Identity and the role of co-ops in building a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive economy.
Notes:	

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL POWER: Has your co-op built up community power?

	a) We have built up solid strategic alliances with community leaders from a variety of community organizations (this can include but is not limited to: community health organizations, food security organizations, faith leaders, youth support organizations, chamber of commerce, planning board, food justice organizations, economic justice organizations, other co-operatives and credit unions, etc.).
	b) We have done a good job building up and building power with "Co-op Champions" in our community, outside of our leadership team.
	c) Our community partners would turn to the Co-op to lead or to partner on community projects.

	d) Our city leaders, town managers, etc. are aware of our Co-op and see it as a force for community development and resilience.
	e) We are actively learning from the experience of other food co-ops and co-op businesses in the wider co-operative economy.
Notes	

V. RIGHT NOW: You don't need a store to be a Co-op...what are you doing right now?

	a) We are serving and building power with our community well RIGHT NOW.
	b) We are serving and building power with our Board leaders well RIGHT NOW.
	c) We are serving and building power with our Volunteers/Committee leaders well RIGHT NOW.
	d) We are serving and building power with our Staff well RIGHT NOW (if you currently have staff).
	e) The work we are doing RIGHT NOW reflects co-operative Values and Principles, our Core Values, and is advancing our Vision and Mission.
Notes:	

This community organizing tool was developed by Bonnie Hudspeth and JQ Hannah, as a partnership between Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA) and Food Co-op Initiative (FCI), with inspiration and some suggested language from Kinga Walker-McCraven (Common Share Food Co-op). It was originally designed for NFCA's Fifth Annual Startup Day in 2020 as a tool to support food co-op startup organizers to reflect on how they are organizing, and encouraging the use of a mutual aid community organizing framework that builds power with and reflects their community in the vision, leadership, participation, and organizational power. It was updated by Bonnie Hudspeth in 2024 as a partnership between Firebrand and FCI.

