



Co-operative Values and Principles

The Values and Principles embraced by today's worldwide co-operative movement have evolved from the ideals of the early co-operators of the 18th and 19th centuries. They are embodied in the Statement of the Co-operative Identity published by the International Co-operative Alliance. For more information about the origins of the co-operative movement, please visit the National Co-operative Archive.

Co-operative Values

Co-operatives throughout the world share a set of values that give them their distinctive character.

Self-help

In co-operatives, people help each other whilst helping themselves by working together for mutual benefit.

Self-responsibility

Individuals with co-operatives act responsibly and play a full part in the organisation

Democracy

A Co-operative will be structured so that members have controls over the organisation – one member, one vote.

Equality

Members will be treated justly and fairly.

Solidarity

Members will support each other and other co-operatives.

Ethical Values

In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of:

- Honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others

Co-operative Principles

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

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

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

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations 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 co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

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

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, 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

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

6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives

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

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