



## Onboarding, Hiring and Personnel Policies for Worker Co-ops

Hiring personnel, orienting them to your team, and creating practical personnel policies are important for any business. Cooperatives have a unique set of considerations.

### 1. Hiring:

When hiring for your cooperative, you need to do all the things other businesses do, but you need to also look for an ownership mindset.

- a. Outreach, job descriptions, postings and position offers will need to include an explanation of your co-op's **membership / ownership process**. Be clear up front on the expectations and benefits of membership. Set membership shares / fees at a level that is meaningful and meets the capital needs of your co-op, but not prohibitive for the kinds of worker owners you seek. Establish trial periods that ensure sufficient interaction to be able to assess shared values, compatible work styles, capability and desire. [This tool helps you work through the considerations for fees and trial periods.](#)
- b. Consider using **online job postings** (such as indeed.com, ZipRecruiter.com, LinkedIn.com and Idealist.org) but also consider **places co-op minded people will be looking**. For example USFWC has a free [job board](#). You can also check to see if you have food or high traffic consumer cooperatives in your area or try social media groups, community centers, and worker centers.
- c. Remember to incorporate processes that **ensure compatible values** and share the co-op's mission and connection to broader movements and community issues in your hiring. Create hiring practices that diminish bias based on systems of oppression (and still comply with your values and applicable employment laws). It is important at this phase to consider different identities such as (but not limited to) race, gender, class, ability, and age to ensure your founding group sets a track of **inclusivity**. Be careful not to tokenize people, but know that it is much harder to create an inclusive workplace if your founders are not diverse or representative of your community. [One great tool for hiring with inclusivity in mind was created by AORTA.coop.](#)



### Additional tips for Startups

- a. Here are some additional basic hiring **tips for startups**:
  - i. Be clear about the skills that you deem fundamental for all core group members to have such as good communication, ability to receive feedback and strong people skills.
  - ii. You need to create and then explain membership rights and responsibilities. [See activity on Page 26 of the guide.](#)
  - iii. Building your core team or steering committee entails finding people who share your values and passion for the products or services you will be offering and also complement the existing core team's skills and experience. Inviting new team members into this committee is not something that should be taken lightly. They will be contributing to the co-op's collective vision, entrepreneurial energy and financial risk. Applications, interviews, references and even trial periods can be useful even at this early stage. Here are sample member skills surveys: [DAWI: Member Skills Assessment](#) | [Sample new team member skills survey](#) and a [Sample Applicant Assessment Score Sheet](#).



## 2. Onboarding:

You've hired your new workers, now how do you make sure they're fully oriented to the co-op workplace? Best practices for any business include orientation and training covering: operations/job functions, job site safety, whistle blowing and harassment (sexual or otherwise) policy and investigation process, industry familiarization, and other personnel policies (see below). In addition to these, strong co-op specific onboarding processes often include many of the following elements:

- a. **Orientation** to key policies that are unique to your co-op such as the membership process, bylaws (including elections, board processes, and decision-making), meeting processes and agenda formation, communications, and profit sharing. A full list of member rights and responsibilities is an essential tool for summarizing and clarifying co-op member participation and expectations. Here are some sample worker co-op orientation processes and packets:
  - i. [Red and Black Cafe Hiring Process](#)
  - ii. [Sample Employee Policy Handbooks](#)
- b. **Visuals** that outline complicated documents such as bylaws can be useful since co-op structures are often new to people. Sample visuals:
  - i. [Cooperative Corporation Bylaws elements graphic](#)
  - ii. [Sample Stick Figure Co-op LLC Operating Agreement](#)
- c. **Buddies** (experienced members) who make themselves available for questions from new workers and have informal check-ins with them.
- d. **Co-op 101 training** on co-op basics for new members which also serve as refreshers for existing members.
  - i. [Sample new member orientation from Arizmendi Association](#)
- e. **A resource library** and curriculum for additional self-paced learning.
  - i. [Evanston Development Cooperative resource library](#)
  - ii. [Equal exchange Worker Owner curriculum](#)
- f. **Bonus:** [Here is a sample onboarding planning template for Probationary Co-op Members.](#)

## 3. Personnel Policies:

In addition to a full membership manual as outlined above, remember that in creating your co-op's Personnel Policies, you don't have to start from scratch. It is important, however, to make sure you are aware of employment laws and are adapting sample policies to your specific work culture. Some things to be sure to include in your policies:

- a. **Worker Rights and Safety:** Though it is a good idea to have a simple [union neutrality statement](#) in your bylaws, your co-op can have a more extensive policy against union busting, as well as anti-oppression policies.
- b. **Accountability, Evaluation, Grievance and Conflict Policies:** see a full two page toolkit for these topics in a co-op [here](#).
- c. **Profit Sharing / Internal Capital Accounts policies:** these are often in your bylaws, but a more accessible summary explaining how these work within your co-op is a good idea.
- d. **Conflict of Interest:** what happens when your personal interests come into conflict with those of the co-op? How can this be avoided or transparently reported? [Sample conflict of interest policy here.](#)
- e. **Tools:**
  - i. [Full sample Personnel Policy document from Equal Exchange.](#)
  - ii. [People's Food Co-op Staff Handbook Example](#)
  - iii. [Peninsula Home Care Staff Handbook Example](#)
  - iv. [The Vital Compass - Staff Handbook Example Table of Contents](#)
  - v. [DAWI has created a great overview of personnel policies available online.](#)

## The Co-op Clinic is here to help your business

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