

# The Seven Cooperative Principles

Cooperatives around the world use the same core principles and values that can be traced back to the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844. The seven cooperative principles encompass the values of cooperation, equity, and community.

## 1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives 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.

## 2. Democratic Member Control

Co-ops are democratically controlled by their members, who set policy and make decisions for the cooperatives. Members have equal voting rights—one member, one vote. Members can never have more than one vote in a cooperative, regardless of longevity or investment.

## 3. Member Economic Participation

Members equally contribute to and democratically control the capital of the co-op. Members can receive a limited distribution of capital through patronage or dividends in proportion to the amount of business conducted through the coop rather than capital invested.

## 4. Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous organizations democratically controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

## 5. Education, Training, and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, board members, managers, and employees to contribute effectively to their cooperatives' development. They inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

## 6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, regional, national, and international structures.

## 7. Concern for Community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members. Cooperatives exist to benefit members and the communities they serve.