

The Seven Cooperative Principles

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Today's cooperatives operate according to seven basic principles. Six were drafted by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in 1966, based on guidelines written by the founders of the modern cooperative movement in England in 1844. In 1995, the ICA restated and reaffirmed the 1966 principles and added a seventh principle to guide cooperative organizations into the 21st Century.

Voluntary, Open Membership

Open to all without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

Democratic Member Control

One member, one vote.

Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. The economic benefits of a cooperative operation are returned to the members, reinvested in the co-op, or used to provide member services.

Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.

Education, Training and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for members so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

Cooperation among Cooperatives

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

Concern for the Community

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