

A STEERING COMMITTEE FOR A WORKER COOPERATIVE

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What is it?

A steering committee (SC) for a worker cooperative is intended to shepherd a project towards formal establishment, including incorporation, a preliminary business plan, **a set of member rights and responsibilities, and a governance structure**. The SC is also designed to build relationships, trust, and mutual knowledge. The SC consults with any needed professionals, for example, re: in the identification of clients, financial feasibility, marketing, and any legal matters. The SC should have a projected date for the completion of its work, normally at least several months but normally for no more than one year.

How is it comprised?

Most importantly, there need to be prospective worker members on the SC. These individuals then become prepared to help lead the cooperative once established. There can be and often are other support members, who can include co-op development specialists, representatives of engaged non-profits, and other interested professionals who contribute needed expertise. The "7 + or - 2" (or 5-9) rule of thumb suggests the optimal size for the SC.

What does it do?

The SC meets regularly to talk through key questions, solidify aspects of the cooperative such as core values, elaboration of the value proposition, and key policies. With consultation, the SC determines such things as wage structure and a governance structure that fits the size, nature and needs of the co-op. The SC determines what staff are needed and any special roles (e.g., a coordinator of work contributions and arrangements). The SC also considers how best to pursue outreach, working towards a diverse body of potential worker-owners. Those conversations lead to a diversity and inclusion policy.

What are its specific goals?

Ideally, each meeting of the SC should have a primary focus, considering not only a specific area of concern but also a timeline with milestones, "working backwards" (if you will) from the anticipated end date of the SC's work. In other words, the SC asks, **"What will need to have happened to get there?"** **The SC gathers needed information and input**—including from similar co-ops—between meetings.

What should be the outcomes of its efforts?

The SC maintains regular contact with other prospective or committed worker-owners. Towards the end of its work, again with the help of consultants and support people, the SC creates a set of core documents, including articles of incorporation and by-laws, to present to the likely membership for further discussion, modification, and then approval. (There are samples of all these documents that can be adapted for the specific co-op's business, goals, structure, and activities.)

What happens in the next phase?

If successful, the SC's work leads smoothly to the creation of a board of directors (or governing council) along with the incorporation of the worker co-op and the set-up of the business (with any necessary staff). The board is elected and is representative of all segments of the workforce as well as the overall interests of the co-op. The board can still have non-worker-owners as members, but such an arrangement is viewed as transitional. The board as well as the entire membership (the committee of the whole) continues to enlist the assistance of consultants, other professionals, and any other individuals and organizations as part of a support network. Other committees—standing and ad hoc—are created for key functions such as financial, worker-member recruitment/socialization, communication and marketing, physical resources and logistics. The articulation of the structure reflects the size and needs of the co-op. The organizational goal is the autonomy of the co-op, although it remains a part of a larger co-op eco-system that includes clients, co-op development consultants, non-profits, partnering businesses, and support professionals. An advisory board can also be created.