

Canary Cooperative Values and Principles

Our Values are important because they support Values Based Consensus and give us parameters for who should be a member of the Cooperative.

Values:

Common Purpose

A common purpose is a basic understanding about the goals, and purpose of the group. A common purpose is a unifying base and agreed upon starting point which is recognized and accepted by all and binds the group together to create a successful cooperative. The Purpose of the Canary Cooperative is to develop a path for chemically sensitive (MCS) and electrically sensitive (ES) people to create housing that is both affordable and safe for the people who live in the cooperative.

Respect

It is everyone's responsibility to show respect to one another. People feel respected when everyone listens, when they are not interrupted, and when their ideas are taken seriously. Respect for emotional as well as logical concerns promotes the kind of environment necessary for developing consensus. Honesty, openness, personal responsibility, courtesy, good manners, kindness, patience, gratitude, accountability, and appreciation all speak to respect for each other.

Values Based Consensus Process

Sensitivity issues including chemical, electrical, and allergy sensitivities present people with a daunting mix of ongoing problems. We have come together to solve those problems in a cooperative structure, and solutions need to meet both the needs of the individual and the needs of the larger cooperative. Using Values Based Consensus process for decision making is a good format to satisfy the dual requirement. Consensus promotes and depends upon self-empowerment and cooperation. The process of Values Based Consensus encourages the intellectual and emotional development of the individuals within a group. In particular, sites will problem solve to the needs of the most sensitive member of the site.

Optimistic activism

All of us with sensitivities have experienced losses and disappointments. It is important that we each make an individual choice not to allow anger and fear to cripple optimistic possibility and cooperation. It takes courage, personal honesty and patience to work toward trust and new understandings. For trust to flourish, it is desirable for individuals to be willing to examine their attitudes and be open to new patterns of thinking. The best decisions arise through an open and creative interplay of ideas.

Active participation in running the cooperative empowers individuals and develops the skills for leadership. Training in leadership is another area of ongoing development and strengthens work inside the cooperative, in the community, and between cooperatives.

Conflict resolution

The free flow of ideas, even among friends, inevitably leads to conflict. In this context, conflict is simply the expression of disagreement. Disagreement itself is neither good nor bad. Diverse viewpoints bring into focus and explore the strengths and weaknesses of attitudes, assumptions, and plans. Without conflict, one is less likely to think about and evaluate one's views and prejudices. There is no right decision, only the best one for the whole group. The task is to work together to discover which choice is most acceptable to all members. Neither approval nor friendship are necessary for a good working relationship. Avoidance of conflicting ideas impedes resolution by failing to explore and develop the feelings that gave rise to the conflict. The presence of conflict can create an occasion for growth. Learn to use it as a catalyst for discovering creative resolutions and for developing a better understanding of each other. With patience, anyone can learn to resolve conflict creatively, without defensiveness or guilt. Groups can learn to nurture and support their members in this effort by allowing creativity and experimentation. Training in conflict resolution should be a continuing process to improve skills. A willingness to participate in conflict resolution is a common shared value. Assume that a conflict can be resolved, but if a conflict persists and is damaging to the group, the board may require a formal conflict resolution, or mediation process to clarify values and resolve the issue.

Financial stability

Financial responsibility and accountability helps keep our cooperative stable and safe. Delays in paying financial obligations endanger the group. Finances should be up to date, transparent, and every coop member should be familiar with the process of keeping the books and discussing budgets. Good financial practices support development of new sites and individual competency levels about financial matters, as well as good group decision making.

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which we put our values into practice.

Principles:

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons willing to accept the restrictions listed in the articles of incorporation and the house rules, and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their own policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. Members agree to work by consensus, and to problem solve to the needs of the most sensitive member. But where majority rule is agreed to, share holders have equal voting rights (one share, one vote).

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is the common property of the cooperative. Members receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative, setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

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

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public - particularly opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of cooperation, chemical injury, environmentally safe housing, and environmental stewardship.

6th Principle: Cooperation among Cooperatives

Members lead by example to help create communities safe for people with chemical injury. Cooperatives serve their members most effectively, and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures for development of cooperatives and housing free of neurological toxins.

7th Principle: Concern for Community

A cooperative is both a small business and a small community. Consensus builds skills for cooperation and community. In addition, time and space is allotted to community building at each site, and in the larger cooperative organization. After focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their wider communities through policies accepted by their members.