

Co-op Conflict Support

Let's get started

- Enter your name and pronouns by clicking the three dots in the upper righthand corner of your Zoom square
- Mute yourself when you're not speaking by clicking the microphone button
- Please join us on camera!
- Questions - Raise your hand to join stack or drop your question in the chat

Who is here?

- Name / Pronouns
- Co-op experience
- Any accessibility needs

Suggested community agreements for today

No One Knows Everything; Together We Know A Lot

Move Up, Move Up

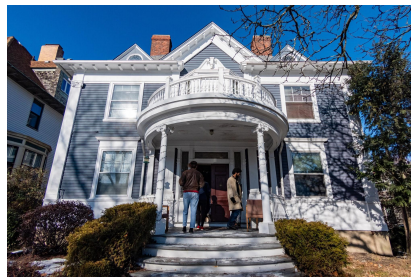
What's Said Here Stays Here; What's Learned Here Leaves Here

We Can't All Be Articulate All of the Time

Be Curious

Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure

Who We Are



NASCO Staff



Katherine Jennings
Director of Operations

Bronwyn Walls
Director of Community Engagement

Liz Anderson
Director of Education

Brel Hutton-Okpalaeke
Director of Development Services

Daniel Miller
Director of Properties

Services

- Cooperative Training Institute
- Staff and Managers Conference
- Cooperatives Internship Network
- On-site trainings
- Consulting services
- Shared Resource Library
- Monthly newsletter
- Cooperative Leadership Certification
- Linking and networking



Who is here?

- Name / Pronouns
- Co-op experience
- Any accessibility needs
- What would you like to get out of this workshop?
- What do you do currently when there is conflict in your co-op?

Outline

- Limits of conflict resolution
- Proactive processes
 - Forming a group
 - Mediation assumptions
 - Community agreements
- Tools for navigating Conflict
 - Nonviolent communication
 - Restorative Circles
 - Negotiation
- Additional Resources
 - Example processes
- Q&A

Limits of Conflict Resolution

Upper Limits of Conflict Resolution

Some situations may be more serious than your members think is appropriate for a conflict resolution process.

Examples include assault, credible threats to safety, major legal issues, or actions seen as fundamentally against your co-op's values or mission.

Define what issues are beyond your co-ops conflict resolution scope and what steps will be taken in those instances.

Lower Limits of Conflict Resolution

Conflicts between members may be routine. Early resolution can prevent friction from becoming deeper conflicts.

Are there some actions that trigger automatic solutions (training, fines, make-up labor, etc)?

What behavior is not a conflict but a communication issue?

Are there types of conflict you leave to houses? To individual members?

Defining the Options

Co-ops can use multiple conflict resolution tools.

Members may decide some tools fit one situation better than another.

You may decide that some methods are more effective as a first step, after which other tools can be tried.

These process options and when to use them should be clear to members - consider using a flowchart or graphics to make a visual resource for common areas / online.

Requiring Participation

The tools used for conflict resolution in your co-op should include options that work for different needs.

Your co-op should also require that members participate in your chosen methods when conflict arises if they want the protections and benefits of conflict resolution from the co-op.

Members should be strongly encouraged to ask for conflict resolution early when it can prevent further harm.

Conflict Resolution Mindsets

The different approaches we'll talk about today have some things in common. Whatever method your co-op uses, you should assume:

1. While living in community with people, expect conflict. It is a normal and healthy part of cooperative living.
2. There is no perfect way to work through conflict
3. Shared purpose and empathy are powerful tools during conflicts
4. Make sure all processes are made available and transparent ahead of time, and all agreements documented once they're made - don't build the plane while in the air!

Conflict Resolution Process Concerns

1. In your policies/toolkit, clearly highlight the purpose of conflict resolution - to protect and support members and staff in accomplishing the co-op's mission.
2. Power imbalances in the co-op are real and must be considered when using any of these tools.
3. Retaliation against staff or members for using the co-op's conflict resolution policies should not be tolerated.

Steps for Effective Conflict Resolution

Start a Committee



Give your committee a name and charter that members support and easily understand

Create a committee charter

Make sure the committee is filled at all times

Make sure the committee is trained regularly

Make sure members know how to contact the committee and what the committee does

Be clear about how the committee's resolution process works

Needs to be driven by members and not staff

Committee Work

- Find 3 - 5 members (depending on co-op size) to serve on the committee.
- Empower committee members to arrange their own trainings, but do document whether these happen and consider using a recurring calendar.
- Be proactive. Do a survey or otherwise inquire as to the needs of members around conflict.
- Develop one or two standard methods to approach conflict.
- Orient all members as to the availability of support and how to access it

Ongoing Education

- Budget for paid trainings
- Schedule a yearly NASCO training
- Create a study group
- Build an orientation packet with new committee members
- Include information on reaching out to the committee and what process it uses in orientations for all new members

Options for your Committee

Co-ops may have parallel paths for dealing with conflict.

This may include grievances, formal investigations, mediation, a review of membership status, or meeting processes tailored to resolving conflicts.

The range of options - and what they can lead to - should be understood by your members.

Member Review, Mediation, or Other Actions

What methods of conflict resolution are available to your members? Are different tools reserved for specific types of conflict?

Does your co-op require some conflict resolution methods to be tried before others are available?

Does your co-op have the same set of options available for all members / houses?

Does your co-op have a process for resolving conflicts among staff or between members and staff (if applicable)?

Types of Conflict Responses

Punitive - those who do wrong are punished

Retributive - those who are wronged receive some form of compensation or rectification for harm committed

Restorative - brings all parties involved back to address the harms caused; assigns active responsibility to offender, but may also recognize harm that they suffered

Transformative - brings all parties involved together to actively create a better situation than the one that led to harm; seeks to change both personal structures of parties involved and social structures within which harm occurred

Committee Considerations

Have a clear timeline for your process

Define confidential information and define who has access to it

Define disclosure of the results of resolution processes

Clear specific policies

Have an attorney review your process

Questions to Consider for Member Review



What body will make the final decision on membership reviews?

What info is required and how is it gathered?

What is the process that will be used?

What information is confidential?

What are the range of possible outcomes?

What steps need to be taken to ensure the process is supported by members?

Questions to Consider for Mediation

When is it appropriate to call for mediation in your system?

Who do members contact to initiate the process?

Are there requirements before this process can be used?

What possible outcomes could be suggested through mediation?

Community Agreements

A community agreement is shared set of expectations that are discussed and decided upon collectively - this is usually more fluid than a formal policy, and acts as an agreement on how to interpret the policies and how to treat one another.

Everyone is socialized differently and without explicitly creating shared expectations people can recreate oppressive structures unintentionally or assume that the default is their own practices.

Conflicts can be addressed proactively by eliminating the opportunity for assumptions about shared expectations.

Common Community Agreements

In interpersonal conflicts

- We can't all be articulate all of the time
- Acknowledge intent but prioritize acting upon impact

In house problem solving

- Be curious
- No one knows everything; together we know a lot
- Needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few

Non-violent Communication ("NVC")

What is Non-violent Communication ?

NVC advocates describe NVC as a guide to communication which gets to the heart of what matters to people without the use of guilt, humiliation, shame, blame, coercion, or threats.

Features of NVC

- Focuses on sharing needs
- Requires relearning of speech patterns
- Can be effective for de-escalation
- Relevant to conflict, but not itself a method of conflict resolution

Expressing and Receiving in Four Parts

Observations - directly observable facts provide a common ground for communication.

Feelings - guess or identify the feeling that you or the other person is experiencing at that moment.

Needs - stating the need, without morally judging it, gives you both clarity about what is motivating you or the other person

Requests - ask clearly and precisely for what you want right now, and allow the other person to say no or propose an alternative.

NVC in Practice

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Observations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid jumping ahead to non-factual feeling statements |
| Feelings | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am feeling X. I am hearing you feel X |
| Needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be specific (i.e. I need safety <i>not</i> I want more locks on the door) |
| Requests | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'I want X.' 'I can/ cannot provide X but I can provide Y' |

Potentially Problematic Aspects of NVC

- This technique is not equally accessible to all people, is most easily used by people with more language privilege or education, and can exclude people who speak english as a second language.
- NVC focuses on acknowledging the choices we each make and accepting responsibility for our own actions, and in some practices may not take into account systemic issues that impact the choices available to us. Depending on the conflict this can be received as victim blaming.

Aspects of conflict to consider when using NVC

- NVC does not address nonverbal communication and is hyper-focused on using the right words. This can be misused by oppressors and allow them to sound morally superior, while still being actively oppressive.
- NVC is an approach to reframe how we talk about conflict, and therefore not a great fit for more urgent issues, or issues experienced as urgent by some members

When might NVC be appropriate for
your co-op?

Restorative Circles

Pre-Circle

The individuals involved in the conflict meet with a community facilitator one-on-one to talk about what happened from their perspective.

The goal of this is to learn how the restorative circle process may help resolve the issue and address the harms to the parties in conflict.

Circle

Circle - Each participant has the opportunity to talk about what happened and its impact on them.

Key questions: What would you like known? What did you hear him/her/them say? Was that it? Is there more?

The circle develops:

1. Mutual understanding of the meaning and impact of the act
2. Self responsibility
3. An action plan that addresses each person's needs. After everyone is heard, the group discusses how to move forward from the incident

We don't begin with projects, we begin with relationships.

- Walk toward conflict
- Start with no agenda, allow for the new to emerge
- Be willing to listen
- Reflect back what the person said
- Ask & confirm if you heard what they wanted you to hear
- Be curious and look for the connection
- Acknowledge your biases, then look again and give each person the benefit of the doubt

Post Circle

Post Circle - The group may meet with a community facilitator again sometime after the circle to check in with the group and make sure the agreement is working.

When might Restorative Circles be appropriate for your co-op?

Negotiation

Voss Negotiation Technique

1. Mirroring / Active listening
2. Tactical empathy
3. Get to a “no”
4. Trigger “that’s right” response
5. Share Control

Mirroring / Active Listening

- Repeat their last one to three words back to them.
 - This will establish rapport and make them feel safe to share honestly.
- This also slows down the conversation to give you more time to think. Taking it slow and being patient will pay off.
- Listening for understanding rather than listening to only respond

Tactical empathy

- Demonstrate that you see the nuances of their emotions.
- Proactively label their fears.
 - Phrases like “It sounds like you are afraid of...” and “It looks like you’re concerned about...” can go a long way to de-escalate.
- Also, list the worst things that the other party could say about you and say them before they can.
- Expressing, rather than denying, any accusations that they may be harboring (no matter how you feel about the accusation) keeps them from festering.

Get to a “no”

- Accepting a No is important for building trust between those in conflict
 - Demonstrate that a NO is acceptable and will be honored in the future
- Being pushed for “yes” makes people defensive; they fear a trap.
 - Lawyers call this—“cornering.” Nobody wants to be cornered.
- But saying “no” makes the speaker feel safe, secure and in control
- Ask no-oriented questions, like
 - “Is now a bad time to talk?” “Are there better times to talk about this?”
 - “Have you given up on this _____?”

Trigger “that’s right”

Trigger a “that’s right” response by summarizing and reaffirming how your counterpart feels and what they want. A great summary that will trigger a “that’s right” is one that reflects the feelings and passions that are driving them but that they may be unaware of.

This creates a subtle epiphany and simultaneously confirms that they share some empathy with you.

The moment you’ve fairly summarized proves to them that you understand their dreams and feelings is the moment a negotiation breakthrough can happen.

Share Control of the Conversation

People want autonomy. Ask questions and leave them agency and space.

Ask open ended questions that start with "how" or "what". "How does that help you?" "What happens if this fails?" Never ask "why" questions.

Asking "How am I supposed to do that?" is powerful. Often they will actually solve your problems for you.

Negotiation is coaxing, not overcoming,
co-opting, or defeating.

Successful negotiation gets your
counterpart to do the work with you and
be a part of solutions themselves.

Pros and Cons of Negotiation in Conflict

Pro

- Can bring in hesitant people
- Builds trust with people not motivated by values-rooted approaches

Con

- Can be seen as transactional
- Won't create transformative or restorative justice
- Implies equal role in conflict
- Does not specifically highlight power dynamics

When might negotiation be appropriate
for your co-op?

Additional Resources

[Fumbling Toward Repair](#)

A workbook to support people who have taken on the coordination and facilitation of formal community accountability processes to address interpersonal harm & violence.

[Challenging Neutrality, Examining Privilege And Encouraging Practitioner Self-Reflexivity: A Social Justice Approach To Alternative Dispute Resolution](#)

Article exploring a social justice approach to mediation

[Transformative Justice: A Curriculum](#)

Includes activities and discussion prompts for your co-op or conflict transformation committee

[NVC Process handout](#)

Little Book of Restorative Justice, Howard Zehr

A short book in accessible language that gives a detailed overview of the methods used and their goals.

Sample Conflict Resolution Processes



[Bloomington Cooperative Living Grievance Procedure](#)
(~50 members, 1 staff, Bloomington, IN)

[Boulder Housing Coalition Mediation & Member Review Policies](#) (~65 members, 1 staff, Boulder, CO)

[Berkeley Student Co-op Grievance Procedure](#) (~1300 members, ~26 staff, Berkeley, CA)

[Community Housing Expansion of Austin Grievance Procedure](#) (~60 members, 2 part time staff, Austin, TX)

[Inter-Cooperative Council - Ann Arbor Grievance Procedures](#) and [complaint forms](#) (~500 members, 20 staff, Ann Arbor, MI)

[Madison Community Cooperative Grievance and Conflict Mediation Procedures](#) (~180 members, ~5 staff, Madison, WI)

[NASCO Grievance Procedure](#) (5 Staff, ~35 board members)

[Students' Cooperative Organization Grievance and Expulsion Policy](#) (~16 members, Athens, OH)

Discussion

Your current system

- What other methods has your co-op used to resolve conflict?
- What questions are coming up for you about your co-op's process?
- Are there conflicts that have not been resolvable through your existing process? Why?

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Thanks!



Questions?