

## What is a community agreement?

A community agreement is a set of expectations that participants have of one another.

- Can be something created for the short term, for example a set of standards to be used for a single complex meeting.
- Can also be a longer term decision for how a coop should operate that you might call a policy.



## Community Agreements: What is a community agreement?

Co-ops are a kind of structure, something that allows a diverse group of people to come together to meet shared needs - like having a community, and an affordable place to live.

A healthy co-op is also a place that respects differences, and balances the needs of members. Housing co-ops are not just organizations; they are peoples' homes, and it is important for people to feel safe and comfortable in their homes - and to know how to help others feel that way.



## Community Agreements: What is a community agreement?

Many co-ops and other organizations that have a social justice mission are moving away from "policies" as a label, because of the word's associations with hierarchical power or authoritarian structures. An alternative that is becoming more widely used is "community agreements."



## Community Agreements: Activity: Round Robin

What are some examples of community agreements in your coop outside of your policies and lease agreement?

Are these community agreements something temporary - for example, shared ground rules for a specific meeting?  
Are these agreements something lasting? Are these agreements written somewhere?



## Community Agreements: What is a community agreement?

Most housing co-ops try to limit hierarchy and prevent concentrations of power. But power, consensus, and hierarchy can mean different things to different people. Most co-ops have a goal of equality among members. However, treating people as equals can mean different things to different people.



## Community Agreements: Why are they valuable in co-ops?

- Members have to work together to meet their shared needs
- Members need to honor their differences.
- We do this by making agreements with one another
- We trust our fellow members to live by those agreements, or to ask for consent to change them.



## Community Agreements: Why are they valuable in co-ops

These agreements we make with one another build accountability:

- discussing everyone's needs
- building an informed consensus about how to meet those needs, and how to treat one another
- including dealing with conflict.



## Community Agreements: difference between policy and community agreements

- A co-op might have a policy that quiet hours are from 11pm to 7am.
- Someone making a lot of noise within that time would be violating the policy, and there might be some sort of penalty.



## Community Agreements: Why are they valuable in co-ops

- For new members: empowering to be told "this is how things work now, but you can change it."
- Helpful for a potential member to get to see the details of how things work, and make an informed decision about whether or not the co-op is for them.
- New members know what is being asked of them when they come in
- By joining the co-op, a new member is consenting to these agreements until a new consensus is reached.



## Community Agreements: difference between policy and community agreements

- The same co-op might have a community agreement to be respectful about noise levels and to be aware that different people have different needs and schedules.
- Someone making a lot of noise at 3pm isn't violating the policy, but if someone asks them to turn down the music and they refuse, they are not respecting the community's agreement.



## Community Agreements: difference between policy and community agreement

Some co-ops have both:

- Policies and rules often address specific issues and outline a process for dealing with problems, or repercussions for certain actions or behaviors.
- Community agreements often are focused on *how* people act, rather than what they do, and are more broadly applicable to situations within the co-op.



## Community Agreements: difference between policy and community agreements

In some coops, a community agreement and a policy are the same thing.

Some coops go as far as to eliminate the language of "policies" entirely, and refer to their written agreements as "current consensus" or "community agreement".

In these cases, there is not a right or wrong solution, as long as these agreements are clear, consensual, and non-discriminatory.



## Community Agreements: What to avoid

For an agreement being made for a specific event – for example, a community agreement for navigating a single meeting – it is important that the agreement be simple and clear enough that it can be adopted and used.



## Community Agreements: Example

Some common community agreements adopted for a specific meeting might be:

- Speak from personal experience and avoid generalizations
- Don't assume someone else's intentions, and limit your comments to their specific words or actions
- Listen up – if you tend to speak up, leave open space for others to step in, and use this space to listen
- Step up – if you tend to be quieter at meetings, consider adding your voice
- Encourage others – if you see members who are speaking much less than others, invite or encourage them to share their views. You might do this by using your time on the floor to ask for someone's views, or you might suggest using a different facilitation method for a moment, such as a Round Robin.



## Community Agreements: Activity

What are situations where you think your house would benefit from a community agreement?

What are some temporary community agreements you might want to make for your coop?

