

**A QUICK GLANCE AT OUR CO-OPS
REDUCING STAFF WORKLOAD THROUGH EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

	Number of Members	Number of Full-time/Salaried Staff	Number of Part-time Staff	Are officers or Presidents financially compensated .?.	Does your co-op have an office hour system?	Estimated hours/week of staff time reduced via officers, office workers, volunteers etc.
Berkeley Student Cooperative	1283	21	6 ¹	Yes	Yes	500 ²
College Houses	531	5	1	-	No	-
Guelph Campus Co-op	400	13	4-8	-	No	-
Inter-Cooperative Council, Ann Arbor	550	8	2-4	Yes	Yes	Few ³
Inter-Cooperative Council, Austin	188	4	0	Yes	No	1
Madison Community Cooperative	200	3	1	Yes	No	0-20 ⁴
MSU Student Housing Cooperative	196	2	1	Yes	Yes	40-60 ⁵
Oberlin Students' Cooperative Association	630	1	2	-	No	-
Pacifico Cooperative	112	1	0	No	No	-
Santa Barbara Student Cooperative Housing Association	75	1	1	Yes	Yes	Little ⁶
Students' Cooperative Association, Eugene	72	0	1	No	No	45 ⁷
University Cooperative Housing Association	415	5	6	Yes	No	Varies

¹ BSC also offers approximately 20 paid Central Level positions for members.

² Includes officers, directors, committee members, members working in the office for their house, and members doing paid office work.

³ The office hour system alone does not reduce staff time considerably, if at all. Note: excludes contributions of executive/coordinating officers in reducing staff time.

⁴ Time saved by volunteers and interns.

⁵ The hours/week of staff time saved is from both office volunteers and executive officers.

⁶ Office volunteers only

⁷ The staff time saved is due to officers, office helper and all members who hold elected "jobs" at the corporate and house level

From our surveys and interviews with student co-op officers, we found that *most* executive officers do the following with little to some staff support:

- Chair committee meetings, prepare and distributing agendas
- Chair the Board of Directors (President), prepare and distributing Board packets
- Serve on or chair hiring and review committees
- Transition new officers, write and update training manuals
- Regularly communicate with members, do relational work with members, and garner support for proposals and changes among members
- Update, implement, and monitor policy (President, Secretary)
- Format minutes for Board approval
- Represent the co-op to various organizations and media
- Market, advertise, and do public relations work for the co-op
- Design fliers for co-op events, brochures, t-shirts etc.
- Publish co-op newsletter and solicit articles from members
- Facilitate conflict mediation meetings, handle grievances and disputes
- Arrange for outside trainers e.g. diversity awareness, anti-oppression, consensus, facilitation, governance-related topics
- Coordinate logistics and content of organizational/Board retreats
- Bottom-line member orientations
- Update the website

The following tasks are reasonable for officers to take on with less staff involvement, or may be great tasks for staff to entirely delegate to officers:

- Serve on boards of affiliated organizations that staff would otherwise do (MCC pays their president extra for sitting on an extra Board)
- Maintain contacts and communication with independent cooperatives (Staff can delegate more networking to officers)
- Coordinate advertising, registration, scholarships, transportation/logistics, and AGM Rep for NASCO programs e.g. Action Camp, Institute
- Recruit new members and fill vacancies
- Handle/support election process
- Bottom-line “Plans for Inclusion” and “diversity awareness” events/initiatives
- Post and hold weekly office hours to assist staff with office work and work on involved projects (officers, directors, and/or committee members)
- Maintain alumni relations
- Attend other networking & training events in place of staff such that staff share representation/relation responsibilities with officers (ICC Ann Arbor sent their President to the Emerging Co-op Leaders Conference as a part of training/development)

Compensation

Some practices of monetary compensation:

- Stipend of \$300/month (MCC and MSC)
- Free or reduced summer rent (ICC, Austin)
- Full or half rent reduction for the President and Vice President, respectively (ICC, Ann Arbor), half rent reduction for coordinators during the academic year (ICC, Austin)
- Suggestion: full reduction of rent and food each month for the President (approximately 30 hours/week of work)

Some officers have expressed frustration with being under-compensated for the work they perform.

Most non-monetary compensation take the form of points/work hours that all members are required to fulfill.

REDUCING STAFF WORKLOAD THROUGH OFFICE HOURS SYSTEMS

MODEL 1: Office Labor Required from Houses or Members

INTER-COOPERATIVE COUNCIL, ANN ARBOR

550 members, 8 full-time staff, 2-4 part-time/non-salaried staff working 10 hours/week on average

System—office labor is required of houses

- The General Manager and Coordinating Committee are in charge of the office labor system.
- The ICC office labor system is based on a quarterly term system. Each house is required to complete a number of office hours each quarter proportional to the number of members they have.
- Houses where the ICC President or Vice President resides receive a 4 hour/week labor credit.
- Members typically complete 1-4 hours/week, but staff prefer 3-4 hour blocks of time to focus on membership services, cleaning, and publications.

Tasks and Assignments

Office volunteers complete a survey and are assigned to a staff member or team/committee for specific tasks and projects.

Office volunteers do the following:

Process contracts	Update the website
Organize archives/file	Check emails, phone calls, general correspondence
Work on involved/special projects	Do alum work
Copy and/or deliver materials to houses	Work on publications
Clean the office	

Assist the President (prepare board packets, send emails)

Sit on committees/teams (includes Sexual Harassment Resource Team)

Training and Tracking

Members are assigned to staff and/or teams/committees with the appropriate job for training and tracking. Hours are also tracked on a giant sheet of paper in the office. Regular, clear, readable reports (perhaps prepared by the General Manager of a Coordinating Committee member) on what hours members have completed, how hours are missing, and upcoming make-up hours opportunities are helpful for members.

Accountability

If a house fails to complete the hours, the house is fined. If the house chooses, the fine can be charged to specific members.

Staff and Member Satisfaction

Both staff and members are both moderately satisfied (3 on a scale of 5, 5 means very satisfied). The office labor system does not significantly reduce staff time, but works fairly well. Some members work in the office every semester and enjoy it, some take up independent projects for office labor credit, and some complain about communication difficulties in setting up office labor days or feel too closely supervised.

MSU STUDENT HOUSING COOPERATIVE

196 members, 2 full-time staff, 1 part-time/salaried staff

System—office labor is required of houses

- The Executive Director is in charge of the system.
- Each house is required to complete 1 hour/week of office work for every 10 members (rounded). In the total system, there is a net of 20 hours/week of member office labor.
- All executive officers are responsible for 6 hours/week of office assistance, but this requirement has not been practiced in years. Executive officers considerably help reduce staff workload.
- The five standing committees can help reduce staff workloads, but their productivity varies widely.

Assignments and Tasks

The Executive Coordinator assigns tasks with members. Some tasks include:

Organize archives/file

Promote events

Work on involved projects

Use graphic design and/or photography skills

Copy and/or deliver materials to houses

Recycle

Clean the office

Training and Tracking

The Executive Director trains members and tracks hours. MSU-SHC uses a sign-in/sign-out sheet for tracking.

Accountability

Fines of \$10/hour for missed appointments are issued monthly. Members can make-up hours. Houses have the option of charging members for missing work in addition to the monthly fine, but never do. If a house does not comply with the office labor system, it is fined.

Member Rewards/Incentives

The staff try to make the office as comfortable as possible and thank each member every week. The Executive Director gives members working in the office a card and organic chocolate bar during the holidays at personal expense.

Staff and Member Satisfaction

Both members and staff are pretty satisfied (4 on a scale of 5, 5 being very satisfied). Members and executive officers offset staff time by 40-60 hours/week.

“I find it rewarding when members repeatedly choose office labor as their house job, compete for it, or split it due to high interest. We expect people work an hour for each hour committed, whereas an hour long house job can often be rushed through in 20 minutes. When they “want” office labor it tells me that we are creating a space in which connections can be made and their time feels well spent.”

--Adrien Vlach, MSU-SHC Executive Director

SANTA BARBARA STUDENT HOUSING COOPERATIVE

75 members, 1 full-time staff, 1 part-time/non-salaried staff

System—labor required for individual members, office labor is one option of labor

The system operates quarterly where *each member* is required to complete 25 points of “service hours” each quarter (roughly 8 hours of work). In addition to working in the office, members can get service hours for any work beyond house jobs. Points can be earned by sitting on committees, being a house officer (monetarily compensated), working in the office and providing a service to members e.g. haircuts, bike and car repair, sewing etc. Extra points carry over to the next quarter.

Tasks

Work on involved projects	Copying and/or deliver materials to
Clean the office	houses
Update the website	

Training and Tracking

Staff train members and track hours.

Accountability

If members fail to complete any of the work, they are charged \$75, or a portion of it for missing some work

Staff and Member Satisfaction

Both staff and members are moderately satisfied with the system (3 out of 5, 5 means very satisfied). Office volunteers do not reduce any weekly staff time at SBC.

MADISON COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE

200 members, 3 full-time staff, 1 part-time staff

The Work Hour System was not successful during the pilot stage. The system ended for a variety of reasons:

- It was too complicated, overall.
- There were not a specific number of hours that each member had to contribute. Instead, there was a floating target each house had to meet. This floating target was determined by a complicated formula involving the voluntary work that other houses put in, and then pro-rating it. In sum, the work required was impossible to quantitatively project accurately.
- Despite efforts at building grass-roots enthusiasm, little true enthusiasm developed before implementation.
- There was a lack of sustained leadership on leading the co-op in implementing such a big shift.
- The volunteer positions were too vaguely defined and too numerous.

Weaknesses of Models That Require Office Labor

- Training and supervising a volunteer to complete a task can take as much time as it would take a staff member to do it themselves
- **Training** is generally very time consuming. If members only need to complete a few hours, training takes as much time as the office labor requirement.
- There are limitations on what tasks can be delegated to members
- Administrative work can feel boring to members, “busy work”
- Keeping people busy with meaningful work is difficult; finding a few hours of work for member can be a burden on staff.
- Volunteers **turnover** every semester/quarter
- Students can be unreliable
- Board can get rid of office hour programs on a whim and leave staff with staffing problems
- Members are typically not available during the day because of school activities; members complete hours at times that are not optimal for the office or staff
- Members can feel frustrated when they do not have enough guidance and work to complete their hours.

- Some members feel that they are too closely supervised; supervision can add to staff time
- Tasks don't always take advantage of members' special skills and talents.

Benefits of Models That Require Office Labor

- With the right technological assistance, staff time can be hugely reduced. At SBC, if they automate much of the data entry that members can do in the office, they can reduce the Member Services Coordinator's workload from 35 hours/week to 20 hours/week. The co-op would only need a second staff person when accepting applications or changing contracts.
- "The first co-op I lived in required each house to give a certain number of work hours to the main office. I happily took on a filing job at office. I believe through my involvement with the office at that level I developed an interest in the governance and structure of my cooperative and have stayed involved ever since. So in my mind the rewarding aspect of office hours is that you get members involved on a level they wouldn't otherwise see and that may get them hooked on co-ops for life."

--Margaret Prest, SBC Executive Director

- Office work can foster relationships between members and staff.
- Office work can alleviate staff work and build more sustainable workloads
- Systems using required office labor often run like "well-oiled machines," are highly systematic and institutionalized, and are easy to implement.
- Office work encourages members to take ownership of co-op operations.

MODEL 2: Office Helper/Support and Interns

INTER-COOPERATIVE COUNCIL, AUSTIN

188 members, 4 full-time staff, no part-time/non-salaried staff

System—a few paid positions, unofficial office support

ICC currently uses members to deliver mail to houses, do room check-in and check-out, and take minutes. ICC used to have an "ICC Support" position, and staff are considering an official office support position.

Training and Tracking

Staff train members, and hours are tracked on a labor sheet

Compensation/Incentives

Minute-takers and mail-deliverers are compensated \$10/hour.

STUDENTS' COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

72 members, 1 part-time/staff working 15 hours/week

System—Official Office Helper Position

Of the executive officers, the treasurer is required to post and maintain 2 hours of office hours during normal business hours each week.

An Office Helper is elected by members elect to a one-year term.

Tasks and Schedule

- Every week, the Office Helper:
 - Checks other houses for SCA business and office mail
 - Photocopies forms, paid bills, and member information (contracts, applications, check-out forms) etc.,
 - Makes Board packets
 - Works on involved projects
 - Organizes the library, archives and files
 - Updates the website.
- Twice each month, the Office Helper cleans the office e.g. sweeping, taking out recycling etc.
- At the beginning of the summer, the Office Helper creates new files for the new fiscal year and writes up a new balance sheet for each member.

Training and Tracking

Staff train the Office Helper. None of the work is mandatory for the Office Helper, therefore tracking is not particularly necessary.

Compensation/Incentives

The Office Helper receives points that go toward their house labor.

Staff and Member Satisfaction

Staff are really happy with the system. They save roughly 45 hours/week between the Office Helper and officers!

MADISON COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE

200 members, 3 full-time staff, 1 part-time staff

System—Summer Interns and volunteers

In the past, interns have been placed through NASCO's internship network. Recently, MCC has used members as interns.

Training and Tracking

The Member Services Coordinator trains and supervises interns.

Tasks

Archive, file

Data entry

Assisting in processing contracts

Work on involved projects

Compensation

Interns are given a rent reduction.

Staff Satisfaction

Interns can save up to 20 hours/week of work for staff, but staff must pick-up slack when interns do not follow through.

Benefits of Models Using Office Helpers/Support and Interns

- Members who actually want to do office work will self-select into Office Helper and intern positions.
- Interns and Office Helpers can become long-term volunteers, and staff hours reduced will offset staff time used for training
- Longer-term interns and office helpers can work on involved projects and utilize their skills, talents, and interests, rather than only assisting administrative work. Many projects can be staff-generated that staff do not have the time to pursue.
- Office Helpers and interns can also assist officers e.g. making Board packets, and in turn, officers might be able to help staff more

Weaknesses of Models Using Office Helpers/Support and Interns

- Volunteers can be unreliable, leaving staff to pick-up the work.
- There is no accountability system with volunteers.
- Volunteers may quit at any time, wasting staff time spent training
- It is a challenge to promote member involvement and empowerment in the co-op; member apathy.

MODEL 3: Offering Members Paid Work and Work Shifts

BERKELEY STUDENT COOPERATIVES

1283 members, 21 full-time staff, 6 part-time staff, 20 member-only positions

System

BSC alleviates Central Level staff work through member work shifts in the office (similar to Model 1) and member-only jobs. For member-only jobs:

- There are approximately 20 positions that work with Central Level staff
- Members hold these jobs usually for less than a year; turnover is not very high
- Members can choose between rent-credits or stipends calculated from the number of hours the position should entail and a \$12.20/hour exchange rate
- Temporary workers often assist in the operations when workloads increase or when assigned workers are absent. BSC maintains an “on-call” list and pays workers \$12.20/hour
- In addition to member-only jobs, part-time and full-time jobs are also open to members

- For member-only positions, “subs” and “temps” must apply and interview with a hiring commission

Tasks and Assignment

Members submit applications for work shifts and member-only jobs.

Tasks at different Central Level departments:

- Central Office-paperwork, data-entry, filing, shredding, general clerical; clean-up; event set-up and/or take-down
- Central Kitchen-paperwork, data-entry, goods packing and/or delivery, meat/cheese slicing, clean-up, inventory, painting.
- Central Maintenance-carpentry, electrical work, plumbing, repairing windows, walls, ceilings, doors, and locks, painting, dump runs, and moving furniture.

Training and Tracking

Training is a huge component for member work shifts and member-only jobs. Staff train members. For the member-only jobs, tracking is not as important since members are not paid on an hourly basis.

Staff and Member Satisfaction

BSC’s officers, committee members, and members working in the Central Level contribute approximately 500 hours/week of work! Staff are fairly satisfied with this system. The money credited or paid to members and the staff work they offset financially balance out. In other words, BSC would need to hire more staff without paying members for work.

Benefits of BSC’s System

- Being “employed” or paid monthly helps reduce turnover for office work and utilizes staff time spent on training well.
- Hiring process makes the work more competitive to some degree.
- BSC offers members with development skills, resumé-building/employment experience, and means to defray their monthly costs.
- Monthly rent-credit or stipend method doesn’t require detailed tracking.
- The combination of regular workers and “on-call” workers minimizes unexpected staff work.

Weaknesses of BSC’s System

- A lot of training is required for the sheer number of members working in the office.
- Peak office times and student’s schedules don’t always align (as in most student co-op work systems). The busiest times of the year (beginning and end of semesters) are when students are settling in or the most unavailable.
- May only work well for larger systems

OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER

CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES

- Being in the office can expose members to personnel and other important issues; care should be taken when discussing sensitive matters in the office.
- Members might have access to sensitive information regarding other members' financial status and payment issues, member disputes, members' personal information e.g. Social Security number, kin information, phone numbers etc.
- Some very specialized volunteers—those working on conflict resolution or sexual harassment issues (ICC, Ann Arbor's Sexual Harassment Resource Team) will need to be trained in confidentiality

TASKS THAT SHOULD NEVER BE DELEGATED TO MEMBERS

- Legally sensitive issues, legal cases
- Payroll
- Personnel
- Major management tasks, mission critical tasks (except under direct supervision)
- Paying bills
- Bookkeeping
- Work requiring access to sensitive information
- Evictions
- Sensitive interpersonal issues

OTHER IDEAS FOR IMPROVING STAFF EFFICIENCY OR REDUCING WORKLOAD

- Guelph Campus Co-op holds a "closed office hours" between noon-2:00pm so staff can have lunch, have staff meetings when necessary, and get work done without member visits. Sometimes the closed office hours are extended when there is a backlog of administrative work.
- Co-ops can work with the university in setting up internships for credit.