



Guide to good member service *in housing co-ops*

Background

For several years now housing co-ops have been paying close attention to good governance. Governance is how the directors and the members who elected them set and control the overall direction of the co-op to ensure its success as a viable business and a healthy co-operative community. Governing a co-op can be different from governing any other organization because of the co-op principle of *Concern for Community*. As a result, housing co-ops have been looking at their operations through the lenses of both *Healthy Businesses* and *Healthy Communities*.

As a business, co-ops have customers that purchase the services they offer. In co-ops we call those customers *members*. Customer Service and Member Service have exactly the same meaning. Regardless of whether your co-op uses the term Customer Service or Member Service the focus should always be on **SERVICE**.

Different cultures have developed over the years in housing co-ops. One culture is of enforcement and expectation and another is of service and engagement.

In co-ops where there is a culture of service and engagement the leadership is concerned with the level of member satisfaction. They take deliberate steps to:

- foster democracy and member engagement
- provide opportunities for members to give feedback to the Board and management, and
- treat members with respect in all of their dealings with them.

Not every co-op is on top of their game when it comes to good service to their members. Much of the conflict we see in housing co-ops could be lessened if the leadership focused on good service to their members.



Tools and resources to improve member service

CHF Canada has developed some tools and resources to assist housing co-ops in their quest to provide better service to their members.

Member Service Charter

The Member Service Charter outlines the Board and management's commitment to providing a high level of member service. This Charter should be reviewed and signed by the Board of Directors at their annual planning session.

Guidelines

Each co-op will need to create its own set of guidelines. The following factors should be considered when developing realistic guidelines for commitments outlined in the Charter, specifically concerning timelines for responding requests and queries:

- the number of hours of service provided by management
- the various forms of communication members and applicants use with the co-op (i.e. email, telephone, mail, office mailbox)
- whether the co-op has a physical or remote management office
- whether the co-op has maintenance staff or contracts maintenance work
- any unique characteristics of the co-op that affect communications

When communicating the guidelines to the members, inform them of the factors you considered. A member may think a response within one week is not good member service if they don't know that management only provides five hours of service per week.





Member Service Tip Sheet

This one-page tip sheet can be posted in common areas of your co-op to remind everyone of the importance of good service to members. It includes 5 tips on simple things that can be done to improve member service at your co-op. Take the time to share this information at member meetings, and include it in newsletters or on your co-op's website.

Member Satisfaction Survey

A customizable survey is available for housing co-ops to learn more about the level of member satisfaction with services provided by the co-op. More information about the *Member Satisfaction Survey* can be found on CHF Canada's website in the Education section.

Member Orientation Package

It's important to include information about good member service in your co-op's member orientation package. Make sure to discuss the importance of good member service when speaking to new members and tell them about the Charter and other resources available at your co-op.

Workshops and Custom Training

Invite all co-op members to take part in workshops on healthy co-op communities and good member services. Workshops are available at regionals events or as a custom workshop at your co-op upon request.