A DEEPER DIVE FROM VOLUME 5

Engaging Younger Members in Your Co-op

Questions to ask and tips to try for reaching younger members.

ABOUT THE DEEPER DIVES

Deeper Dives are practical companions to the Co-op Foundations Series. Each one picks up a topic from a volume and goes a little further. This one builds on Volume 5, Member Engagement.

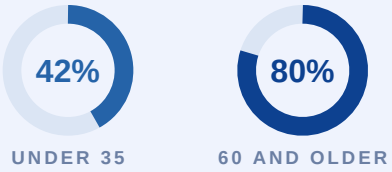
Why This Matters

A co-op runs best when its board and meetings reflect the full membership, including members of every age. Younger members are voters, volunteers, and potential board candidates, just like everyone else.

But younger members tend to be harder to engage. Many are juggling full-time work and raising kids. They're also more likely to rent, which can make membership less clear. Renters who pay their own electric bill are members, though many don't realize it. Those with utilities included in the rent usually aren't members, since the landlord holds the account.

Reaching younger members may take some creativity, and the questions and tips that follow are a good place to start.

RENTERS & MEMBERSHIP



Rural and small-town households that own their home

Who holds the membership?

- ✓ When renters pay the electric bill, they're members, though many don't realize it.
- ✗ When utilities are included in the rent, the landlord usually holds the account and the membership.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Assess	Decide What's Next	Dig Deeper
Eight questions to see where your co-op stands today.	Six tips, plus an action plan to get started.	More questions to help a board or staff explore specific areas.
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Assess Where You Stand

Work through these questions together as a board and staff. Use the space beside each one to note what you know now and what you'd like to find out.

		WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT TO FIND OUT
1	How many members under 40 do we have, and who are they (singles, couples, young families, renters, remote workers)?		
2	Are our meetings at times and places that work for people with full-time jobs, young kids, or busy schedules?		
3	In our first few contacts with a new member, do we send long letters, or short emails and texts?		
4	Do younger members know they are owners, with a vote and capital credits?		
5	Do we know what younger members in our community care about?		
6	Have we asked younger members directly what would get them involved?		
7	Who is out talking with members for us, and does anyone on that team look like the members we're trying to reach?		
8	What is one new idea we could try this year to engage younger members? How will we measure the results?	OUR IDEA AND HOW WE'LL MEASURE IT	

PLAN IT ON PAGE 4 ›

Tips for Engaging Younger Members

No co-op needs to try all of these. Start with the ideas that fit your members and your community.

Show up where they already are.

Hold meetings in community spaces people already visit. Family-friendly events reach parents, while a casual evening event reaches singles and couples.

Invite them in, don't just inform them.

Offer a short series, tour, or advisory group where younger members can learn how the co-op works and share ideas.

Match the platform to the age.

UNDER 30	30 TO 49
TikTok	Facebook
Instagram	Instagram
YouTube	YouTube

Use YouTube for short how-to videos, like setting up your account or getting ready for an outage.

Lead with local impact.

Share what the co-op does in the community, like local giving, scholarships, youth programs, and local renewable projects. These often matter to younger members, but many don't know their co-op offers them.

Let them do business on a phone.

Make it easy to start service, pay a bill, and report an outage from a phone, with text alerts.

Let peers carry the message.

Send younger staff and members out to talk with people their own age.

Try one thing and measure it.

BUILD YOUR PLAN ON PAGE 4 ›

1. Pilot one idea.
2. Measure the results.
3. Build on what works.

Your Action Plan

Choose one idea to try this year, and use these steps to guide the work and check your progress.

WHO LEADS _____ START DATE _____ CHECK-IN DATE _____

1 THE IDEA

WHAT WE'LL TRY

WHO WE WANT TO REACH

☐ Singles ☐ Couples ☐ Young families ☐ Renters ☐ Remote workers ☐ Other _____

2 LEARN FIRST

Learn from your statewide association and peer co-ops before building something new.

WHO WE'LL TALK TO BEFORE WE START

☐ Statewide association ☐ Peer co-ops ☐ Younger members ☐ Other _____

3 MEASURE IT

WHAT WE'LL MEASURE	WHERE WE ARE NOW	OUR GOAL	WHAT HAPPENED
e.g., Members under 40 at the annual meeting			

4 WHAT'S NEXT

WHAT WE LEARNED

OUR DECISION

☐ KEEP IT ☐ CHANGE IT ☐ STOP IT

More Questions to Ask

Ready for more? These questions can help a board or staff dig into specific areas.

DIG DEEPER
FOUR AREAS TO EXPLORE

Knowing Your Members

- Do we track meeting attendance and election turnout by age? If not, how will we know whether things are improving?

Showing Up

- Do we offer anything that makes attendance easier, like a meal, childcare, or a casual evening option?
- Are we visible at the places younger members spend time, like community events, school sports, and local gathering spots?

Communicating

- Do we write content for each social platform, and are we on the platforms younger members use most?
- Are we sharing how the co-op connects to the things younger members care about?
- In addition to reliability and rates, do we share a wide range of messages that communicate:

How the Co-op Works	Our Community Impact	Programs Members Can Use	The People Behind the Co-op
Member ownership, voting, capital credits	Local giving, scholarships, youth programs	Energy-saving rebates, EV programs, paperless billing	Line crews, staff, member stories

Leadership

- Does our board reflect the age range of our membership? If not, what is keeping younger members from running?
- Do we have a way for interested younger members to grow into leadership, like a member advisory group?

A co-op belongs to all of its members.
Make sure younger members know they're a part of it.

Sources & Acknowledgements

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ABOUT THIS DEEPER DIVE

Written by Co-op Innovation Network for co-op boards and leadership. It builds on Volume 5, Member Engagement, of the Co-op Foundations Series.

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