

## **Voluntary and open membership**

The first of the Rochdale Principles states that co-operative societies must have an open and [voluntary](#) membership. According to the ICA's Statement on the Co-operative Identity, "Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination."

## **Anti-discrimination**

To discriminate [socially](#) is to make a distinction between [people](#) on the basis of [class](#) or [category](#). Examples of social discrimination include [racial](#), [religious](#), [sexual](#), [sexual orientation](#), [disability](#), and [ethnic](#) discrimination. To fulfil the first Rochdale Principle, a Co-operative society should not prevent anyone willing to participate from doing so on any of these grounds. However, this does not prohibit the co-operative from setting reasonable and relevant ground rules for membership, such as residing in a specific geographic area or paying a membership fee to join, so long as all persons meeting such criteria are able to participate if they so choose.

## **Motivations and rewards**

Given the voluntary nature of co-operatives, members need reasons to participate. Each person's motivations will be unique and will vary from one co-operative to another, but they will often be a combination of the following:

- Financial – Some co-operatives are able to provide members with financial benefits.
- Quality of life – Serving the community through a co-operative because doing service makes one's own life better is perhaps the most significant motivation for volunteering. Included here would be the benefits people get from being with other people, staying active, and above all having a sense of the value of ourselves in society that may not be as clear in other areas of life.
- Giving back – Many people have in some way benefited from the work of a co-operative and volunteer to give back.
- Altruism – Some volunteer for the benefit of others.
- A sense of duty – Some see participation in community as a responsibility that comes with citizenship. In this case, they may not describe themselves as volunteers.
- Career experience – Volunteering offers experiences that can add to career prospects.

## **Democratic member control**

The second of the Rochdale Principles states that co-operative societies must have democratic member control. According to the ICA's Statement on the Co-operative Identity, "Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and

women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.”

### **Member economic participation**

Member economic participation is one of the defining features of co-operative societies, and constitutes the third Rochdale Principle in the ICA's Statement on the Co-operative Identity. According to the ICA, co-operatives are enterprises in which “Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.” This principle, in turn, can be broken down into a number of constituent parts.

#### **Democratic control**

The first part of this principle states that “Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative.” This enshrines [democratic control](#) over the co-operative, and how its capital is used.

#### **Limitations on member compensation and appropriate use of surpluses**

- “Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership.”
- “Developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible;” in other words, the surplus can be reinvested in the co-operative.
- Benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative;” for example, a [Consumers' Co-operative](#) may decide to pay [dividends](#) based on purchases (or a 'divvi').
- “Supporting other activities approved by the membership.”

#### **Autonomy and independence**

The fourth of the Rochdale Principles states that co-operative societies must be autonomous and independent. According to the ICA's Statement on the Co-operative Identity, “Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.”

## **Education, training, and information**

“Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation.”

## **Cooperation among cooperatives**

The sixth of the Rochdale Principles states that co-operatives cooperate with each other. According to the ICA's Statement on the Co-operative Identity, “Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.”

## **Concern for community**

“Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.