

Competitive Board Elections

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The board of directors is critical to the success of a cooperative. The board is responsible for approving major strategic and financial decisions. They also have the critical tasks of both monitoring and partnering with the CEO. Almost everything that happens, or doesn't happen in a cooperative is due to the board of directors. Cooperatives operate under the principle of democratic member control. The election of directors is where this democratic principle is put to action. The goal for every cooperative should be to have competitive elections with more than one outstanding candidate for each open board position.

The path to outstanding board candidates starts with member education. Members need to know how the board functions and the desired qualities for board candidates. Members must have an understanding of the board role, and the challenges facing the cooperative in order to make an informed choice on director candidates. Every cooperative should be educating the membership to foster an awareness and appreciation of the value created by the board.

In order to have a competitive board election the right individuals must be in the pool. Potential board candidates must have demonstrated integrity in accord with the board's code of conduct. Board candidates need to be independent thinkers but also must be able to contribute to the group decision-making process. A board member must be able to consider an issue with an open and critical mind. They must also support the policies and decisions made by the board and support the CEO when he/she is applying board policies.

Attracting board candidates should be a year around job. Members must be educated so that they can understand the desired qualities of board candidates. As they become better informed more members may consider running for the board. Members are busy but they also allocate their skills and energies where they are valued and appreciated. The path to creating a board candidate starts with asking them.

In today's environment your cooperative needs a diverse team of engaged and dedicated directors. Democratic member control is a powerful cooperative principle. Strive to bring it to life in your cooperative through meaningful, competitive board elections.

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