

DEMOCRACY AT WORK NETWORK

SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATIONS

*A TOOLKIT FOR WORKER COOPERATIVES
AND DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES*

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TOOLKIT CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	3
2. WHEN TO USE THIS TOOLKIT IN YOUR WORKPLACE OR ORGANIZATION	5
3. HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT	6
4. ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION TOOLS	7
5. WE ALSO RECOMMEND	18
6. ABOUT DAWN	19
7. CREDITS	21



1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

WHY DID WE CREATE THIS TOOLKIT?

Each year, DAWN Peer Advisors receive dozens of requests for assistance with systems of accountability and evaluation, from startups and veteran coops alike. Addressing concerns about accountability and performance can be difficult in any group. Members of worker cooperatives may find it especially challenging to hold each other accountable, because members are all equal as owners. In democratic workplaces and collectives, there can be a very real tension between democratic decision-making and the role of “supervisor” or “manager.” This tension can slow down your business and create an unhealthy work environment. DAWN set out to assemble resources and advice for democratic workplaces to help them improve accountability, while maintaining their cooperative values and culture.



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WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Accountability refers to the ability of an organization or person to follow through, to make sure everyone does what they say they are going to do. It is the willingness to challenge others to meet your expectations, and to admit when you cannot meet their expectations. A “system of accountability” is a transparent set of policies and practices that enables members of a coop or group to hold each other accountable for tasks, behavior, and organizational performance. We take a wide view of systems of accountability; they are not limited to performance evaluations and disciplinary procedures. They are they complementary tools and practices that keep your group on track day to day and year to year. Accountability is a two-way street – it applies to a

coop’s ability to respond to members and employees as well as an employee’s ability to fulfill job duties. When used systematically—that is, applied equally to all employees and work groups—they help depersonalize difficult conversations, and create space to celebrate a job well done.

This toolkit will be most effective in groups who are committed to a culture of communication and accountability.

WHO CAN USE THESE TOOLS?

Worker cooperatives and other organizations interested in transparent and effective management of individuals and groups, tasks, or projects. It can be adapted for collective or hierarchical management. It can be used in consumer coops and non-cooperative workplaces. Large co-ops of 100+ members can use all of these tools, and committees of 3 people can use most of them. This toolkit will be most effective in groups who are committed to a culture of communication and accountability.



WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES?

Clear, consistent systems of accountability set up members and organizations for success. We hope to provide cooperators with tools, resources, and confidence to govern their cooperatives and manage day-to-day operations efficiently and effectively. Implementing systems of accountability can reduce or prevent interpersonal conflict, improve morale and job satisfaction, and increase your coop's efficiency.

WHAT'S IN THE TOOLKIT?

This toolkit contains techniques and templates, with instructions and good practices, in four distinct areas.

- ▶ **Task Management:** How to keep everyone on track in between meetings
- ▶ **Check-ins and Workplans:** Managing projects and responsibilities
- ▶ **Performance Evaluations:** Regular Feedback and Goal-Setting
- ▶ **Discipline and Termination:** Responding to Underperformance

We have also sprinkled discussion guides throughout the toolkit. The “Ask yourselves...” sections contain questions to help guide your coop through the process of developing and implementing the right system of accountability for your group.



2. WHEN TO USE THIS TOOLKIT IN YOUR WORKPLACE OR ORGANIZATION

Ideally, your group will develop and implement systems of accountability and evaluation before you need them. However, we find that many groups do not address accountability until it becomes a problem. If this is the case in your group, don't panic and rush to create a broad policy out of fear approaching a specific situation head-on will be uncomfortable.

ASK YOURSELVES...

Is this an issue of workplace safety, sexual harassment, discrimination, violation of labor laws or other legal infractions? *If the answer is yes, you need to inform the appropriate member or governance body and take immediate action.*

Is this an issue of interpersonal conflict? *If so, use mediation or other conflict resolution techniques.*

Do you have urgent concerns about quality control or a time-sensitive project falling off track? *Assign a point person or group to take steps to directly address the situation in the short-term, before it turns into a crisis.*

You may find these steps address your current problem and empower your group to tackle similar problems in the future. However, if your coop does need a comprehensive solution, take the time to develop a thoughtful system of accountability that reflects your organization's values and structure. This may take a few months to a year to develop and implement. It may take years of practice to hone your members' skills in this area and ingrain these tactics in your organization, but we think the results are worth the effort.

NEED A HELPING HAND?

DAWN Peer Advisors can help your coop develop effective systems of accountability and evaluation. Using a DAWN Peer Advisor is beneficial because:

- ▶ *DAWN Peer Advisors have experience and training specific to worker cooperatives, so we understand the dynamics of democratic management and peer-to-peer evaluations*
- ▶ *We can expose your coop to a variety of models and share resources from other coops*
- ▶ *We bring a fresh perspective and new energy to difficult problems*
- ▶ *We can facilitate when emotions are running high*
- ▶ *We "train the trainers," building your capacity to address these and other concerns within the coop*

Throughout this toolkit, we will highlight ways in which DAWN Peer Advisors can help your coop "shore up" your accountability infrastructure and build the skills you need to keep your coop healthy. To learn more about DAWN's services or request assistance with a specific problem, visit www.dawn.coop.

3. HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Once you are ready to commit to the development process, consider the following steps:

- ☑ *Convene* a committee or work group to identify your unique objectives– we recommend a representative committee that reflects the diversity of your members.
- ☑ *Survey* your current resources and policies: Do you need to supplement your current practices or start from scratch? Do you have the skills and information you need, or do you need support?
- ☑ *Draft* a plan of action. Your plan should include:
 - ▶ **Objectives:** What do you hope to accomplish with this system? Is your primary goal monitoring employee performance? Employee career development and job satisfaction? Quality control, cost control, or meeting sales goals?
 - ▶ **Values:** What values should your system reflect?
 - ▶ **Tactics:** What tactics do you want to apply in your organization to accomplish these objectives? Use this toolkit as a menu of options – pick and choose the tools you need, and adapt them for your coop’s objectives and culture.
 - ▶ **Timeline:** for developing and implementing the system.
 - ▶ **Point people:** Who will be responsible for the project overall? We recommend a team, which may be different from the steering committee.
 - ▶ **Cost:** Do you have a budget for technical assistance if you’d like outside support?
- ☑ *Present* the draft plan to the decision-makers in your coop. Even if it isn’t required by your governance structure, create opportunities for worker-owner feedback or ratification. This will create transparency from the ground-up and increase buy-in.
- ☑ *Develop* your system. Assign point people and timelines for every tool and technique you’d like to adopt. Include feedback loops to create the best tools for your coop.
- ☑ *Implement* your system. Include trainings for all members, and special trainings for managers (if you have them). Remember to update your new employee orientations to incorporate the new system.
- ☑ *Evaluate* your system once it is up and running. Solicit feedback on the evaluation system itself from all participants—you can do this within evaluation surveys or workplan meetings. Assign a point person for collecting this feedback and reporting back to the coop. Schedule a time to review your system and how well it is working for your group (we recommend 6 months to one year). Identify who is empowered to change it and how they can make that decision.

NOTE: We strongly recommend that you consult a lawyer or your state Department of Labor before you implement your system, especially regarding compensation and performance evaluations. If your workplace is unionized, consult your union steward and officials for additional requirements.

4. THE TOOLS

In this toolkit you'll find a selection of tools your coop can use to build organizational accountability. Selected tools are appended to this document. These are tools that DAWN Peer Advisors and our clients have found most useful. They are designed to layer and build upon each other. The skills you develop in meetings will help you with discipline and vice versa. Your coop may be great at running meetings, but need improvement on performance evaluations. Every coop is unique; we encourage you pick and choose. Adapt these for your coop—or send us your own examples! A DAWN Peer Advisor can help you prioritize, customize and implement the tools you need.

- **Task Management**
- **Check-ins and Workplans**
- **Performance Evaluations**
- **Discipline and Termination**

NOTE: For ease of reading, we have used the term “employee” to refer to coop workers regardless of membership status. These tools can also be used with owners and non-owners, contractors and consultants, committee members, directors, etc. We have used the word “mentor” to refer to employees who are carrying out supervisory duties in a flat management structure.

TASK MANAGEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

The building block of good accountability is task management. This applies to daily job requirements, coop responsibilities, committee obligations, and special projects. The key components of task management are agreement between colleagues:

- What is the task?
- Who is responsible for the task?
- When is the task due?

We have gathered several practices that promote task management: meeting cycles, standing agendas and frequent task review. When your coop uses the right tools regularly, you free up your energy to actually dig into the meaningful conversations about the work you want to do and how to get it done. You can apply these techniques to your coop's annual general meeting or a 2-minute hallway conversation.

Meeting Cycles

Hold yourselves accountable for running effective meetings! You can get a lot more done, with less stress, when you don't have to spend a lot of time scheduling meetings, recruiting a facilitator, and chasing down agenda items. We recommend the following practices for membership meetings, boards, committees, project teams and departments, and have created a worksheet [DAWN Meeting Tools Worksheet.docx] to help you implement them.

1. Standing Schedules/Advance Schedules. Plan routine meetings far in advance, and expect members to respect the commitment.

- Do you have meetings at regular intervals? Announce – or ask participants to choose – a standing schedule for meetings. You might meet on the second Friday of every month at 10am, or every other Tuesday at 4pm.



When your coop uses the right tools regularly, you free up your energy to actually dig into the meaningful conversations about the work you want to do and how to get it done.

- ▶ If standing schedules don't work, consider "calendarizing out the year" for smaller groups. Once per year, take the time to schedule your meetings for the next 12 months.

ASK YOURSELVES...

Do you have a trained group of facilitators and note-takers, or does everyone rotate through?

Do you choose a facilitator in advance, or call for volunteers at each meeting?

What are the pros and cons of each option?

2. Meeting Roles. Establish standing meeting roles—typically a facilitator, and notetaker, and optionally a timekeeper and a “vibes-watcher.”

- ▶ Appoint or elect members to serve in those roles on a regular or rotating basis. Some groups prefer to rotate everyone through these leadership positions, to share the work and develop members' skills. Other groups recruit individuals or team to fill these roles. Either way, make sure everyone understands their responsibilities and has the resources and training they need!
- ▶ Many groups also find it useful to designate a standing “convener” – someone responsible for scheduling meetings, sending reminders and administrative information, and keeping track of roles – or a “needle,” who is responsible for nudging everyone to keep tasks and projects on track.

3. Meeting Timelines. Meetings are more effective if everyone has enough time to prepare and follow up. Set clear timelines and point people for submitting agenda items and background materials, sending the agenda to participants, and posting notes or next steps. These timelines should be consistent, but can be adapted for different groups. Use our Meeting Tools Worksheet [*DAWN Meeting Tools Worksheet.docx*] to set guidelines for your group, and consider the following examples:

Type of Meeting	Agenda Items due to facilitator	Supporting Documents due to facilitator	Agenda and Documents posted	Notes and Tasks posted
Weekly department meetings	2 days before	2 days before	1 day before	via e-mail next day
Monthly café meetings	day of	n/a	in meeting	posted immediately
Quarterly Board meetings	3 weeks before	2 weeks before	1 week before	via email within 2 days

Standing Agendas

Create a standing agenda template (or use ours!) so you don't have to reinvent the wheel each time. We have included two templates in this toolkit. The first [*DAWN Sample Coop Meeting Agenda.xlsx*] is designed for more formal meetings, such as coop or Board meetings, in an office setting. The second [*DAWN Sample Department Meeting Agenda.docx*] is for less formal meetings, such as department or committee meetings, and is especially suitable for a retail or shop setting. To create your own standing agenda:

- ▶ Identify items you'd like to include in every meeting, from “housekeeping” to committee reports, and create space for new items.
- ▶ For each item on the agenda, identify the objective: is this a discussion? An informational report? A vote?
- ▶ Use your agenda as a template for notes. Set clear expectations for note-takers: should they capture discussions or just decisions? What's the deadline for posting notes?
- ▶ Evaluate your templates periodically and revise them as needed.
- ▶ Consider including a task review at the beginning and end of every meeting.

ASK YOURSELVES...

Does your coop have “meeting guidelines” or “agreements”?

Do you think it’s important to have checkins, recognitions, and evaluations at each meeting?

How can members get items on the agenda?

Do they need to petition or submit it through a representative?

Is the decision at the discretion of the facilitator? Is there an “open space”?

The meeting tools and practices addressed here are those specifically designed to improve accountability in coops. Facilitating effective meetings is an important skill that may require additional training. See “Facilitation Tips” [*Good Practices for Running Effective Meetings*] in the appendix for good practices. DAWN Peer Advisors can also provide training in democratic communication and decision-making, or refer you to communication specialists.

Frequent Task Review

BEFORE EACH MEETING

- › Recap previous meeting’s task list in the agenda

AFTER EACH MEETING

- › Send written recap within 24 hours of the meeting
- › Send reminders mid-way between meetings

DURING EACH MEETING

- › Review old tasks at the beginning of each meeting
- › Review tasks at the end of each agenda item
- › Recap new and ongoing tasks (with deadline and point person) at the end of the meeting

APPENDICES FOR THIS SECTION »

1. *DAWN Meeting Tools Worksheet.docx*
2. *DAWN Sample Coop Meeting Agenda.xlsx*
3. *DAWN Sample Department Meeting Agenda.docx*
4. *Good Practices for Running Effective Meetings – JOE/ SEAC handout*

CHECK-INS AND WORKPLANS

“Check-ins” and workplans are informal, but structured meetings between an employee and a supervisor or mentor. The workplan is a specific tool to manage workloads, while check-ins are more casual. Check-ins and workplans are regularly scheduled meetings, not an emergency response. As always, you should clearly identify tasks for follow-up, but this isn’t a paper-pushing meeting—it’s a chance to listen and discuss. When used consistently, either tactic should expose problems before they get out of hand.

If your coop has non-member employees, temporary or seasonal employees, you may opt to use different tactics with each type of employee – for example, you may have 2-month check-ins with seasonal employees and monthly workplans with members. However, each employee should have access to some form of regular check-ins, and the more systematic you are, the better.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

- *Welcome – how are you feeling today?*
- *Time check, select notetaker*
- *Review last check-in notes: did we accomplish our tasks?*
- *What’s new?*
- *What’s going well?*
- *What could go better?*
- *How can we help?*
- *What do we need from you?*
- *Recap new tasks (include deadlines and point person)*
- *Who will send out notes?*
- *Schedule next meeting*

- tasks related to an ad-hoc project
- one person’s entire workload including day job, coop participation, special projects, ongoing responsibilities and as-needed tasks.

Check-ins

The check-in is more effective for individuals than groups. It doesn’t require a particular form, but you should agree on objectives and create a standing agenda or conversation guide. If you practice these skills often, you may not need a written agenda, but do take notes on next steps, and share them with participants in writing.

Workplans

If a structured form is more effective for your coop, consider the workplan. It is designed to be tailored to your needs and can be adapted for individuals or groups. It can be used to manage:

- weekly or monthly workflow within a job description
- workflow in a governance body, committee or department

The image shows three templates for workplans and check-ins:

- Matrix Template:** A 2x2 matrix with 'More Urgent' and 'Less Urgent' on both axes. The vertical axis is labeled 'More Important' and 'Less Important'. The top-left quadrant is shaded with a dotted pattern.
- Project Workplan Table:** A table titled 'YOUR COOP • Project Work Plan' with columns for 'Deadline', 'Support Needed', and 'Follow-up'. It includes fields for 'Lead', 'Project Dates', and 'Mentor'.
- Monthly Work Plan & Review Form:** A form titled 'YOUR COOP • Monthly Work Plan & Review' with fields for 'Member/Employee', 'Month/Year', 'Hire Date', and 'Mentor'. It includes sections for 'Key Goals for the Year', 'Employee Goals for the Year', 'Position & Basic Responsibilities', 'Ongoing Responsibilities & Committees', and 'Coop Time'. It also has a section for 'To be Filled Out by the Employee' and 'To be Filled Out by the Mentor'.

We have included three templates in this toolkit: a holistic workplan [5. *DAWN Employee Workplan*] for individual employees, a project workplan [6. *DAWN Project Workplan*], and workplan quadrants for strategically prioritizing

tasks [7. *DAWN Workplan Quadrants*]. The biggest advantage of a workplan may be that it requires an employee to pledge time to review tasks and workload with a mentor or supervisor. The coop or supervisor can check in on project status, while the employee or team can ask for help if needed. The “*I’m proud of.../I could improve on...*” section creates a culture of reflection and evaluation.

NOTE about accountability and technology: Project management software, apps and online resources, such as TeamWorks PM and Trello, are becoming quite accessible and affordable . We encourage you to explore these and other project- and task-management programs in order to determine if they are suited to your industry, capacity, and budget. However, while these can help your coop monitor performance, software cannot replace a dialogue about employee satisfaction, performance and fit.

How to use a workplan:

- ▶ Determine how you’d like to use it and revise the categories, instructions, and timeframe to fit.
- ▶ Present the tool to the coop and train everyone how to use it.
- ▶ Employee/mentor pairs schedule a 1 hour meeting to fill out the workplan together. Follow the instructions on the template, or create your own. The employee and mentor should each keep a copy, especially if the mentor has committed to any support tasks.
- ▶ At the next meeting, you should have a partially-completed workplan and a blank new one. Review the old workplan for progress and add follow-up comments as needed. This can be as simple as “Done!” or it can identify next steps. If desired, employee and mentor sign and date the old workplan. Copy ongoing projects onto new workplan, add new ones, and repeat the process.
- ▶ Review the tool periodically and revise as needed.

ASK YOURSELVES...

Should every employee in our coop have structured check-ins or workplans?

Will we assign peers or supervisors to review workplans?

Will workplans be confidential or public?

Do we want to file checkin notes with an employee’s personnel file, or are they just a management tool?

APPENDICES FOR THIS SECTION »

5. *DAWN Employee Workplan.docx*

6. *DAWN Project Workplan.docx*

7. *DAWN Workplan Quadrants.xlsx*



PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Performance evaluations facilitate feedback and goal-setting. They take more time and effort than check-ins and workplans, and typically take place annually. They provide opportunities to collect information from peers and stakeholders, reflect on fit in the job and coop, and discuss career development. Democratic workplaces typically combine worker self-evaluations with peer, supervisor, and sometimes client evaluations in a “360° evaluation system.”



Your evaluation process must be consistent and transparent if it is going to be positive and empowering for employees and managers.

ASK YOURSELVES...

What are our objectives?

How much time do we want to spend on evaluations?

Should we collect feedback from peers and clients?

Will evaluations be signed or anonymous?

Should we use online surveys, e-mail, hard copies, or live discussion?

Do our employees know how to give and receive constructive feedback?

Structured peer evaluations are especially important in collectively-managed businesses, and regularly scheduled evaluations are also helpful for groups such as Boards or standing committees as well as individual employees. A performance evaluation should not be an emergency response to an incident or concern, but a regularly scheduled event.

We approach designing an evaluation system in two parts:

- 1) Designing the evaluation form
- 2) Designing the evaluation process

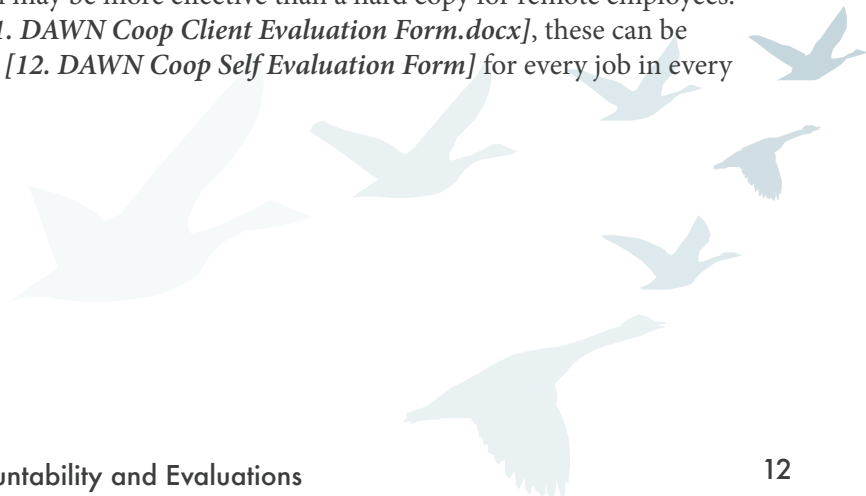
Designing the evaluation form is the easy part! Designing your evaluation procedure is more difficult.

Your evaluation process must be consistent and transparent if it is going to be positive and empowering for employees and managers. See our “Good Practices” [8. *Good Practices for Designing Coop Eval Systems.docx*] for tips on designing your evaluation system, and remember to consult a lawyer or your state Department of Labor for regulations regarding performance evaluations, compensation, and anonymity.

Evaluation Forms

Both the questions and the format of your evaluations should reflect your coop’s unique culture. In the appendix we have included several sample evaluations for you to customize. Questions may relate to your values, mission, and structure in addition to specific job expectations. Evaluation criteria should be based on job descriptions, coop mission and values statements, and individual goals.

The format should reflect your industry and job setting: for retail employees, survey-style evaluations [9. *DAWN Coop Peer Evaluation Form – Survey.docx*] may be more effective than essay questions [10. *DAWN Coop Peer Evaluation Form – Essay.docx*], and an online form may be more effective than a hard copy for remote employees. If your industry lends itself to client evaluations [11. *DAWN Coop Client Evaluation Form.docx*], these can be especially valuable. We recommend self-evaluation [12. *DAWN Coop Self Evaluation Form*] for every job in every industry.



Evaluation Process

Once you have determined what you want to evaluate, decide when, how, and what next.

- ▶ *When:* Annual evaluations are typical, but you might consider a different timeline, especially if you are in a seasonal business or have high turnover. If you have a formal “probationary period” for new employees, consider conducting a preliminary evaluation at the end of this period. Establish a standard timeframe for soliciting reviews: two days is not enough time, but one month may be too long. Also consider how to ensure participation from a wide range of employees: some coops set aside time at staff meetings for employees to fill out evaluations, rather than asking employees to “find the time” on their own.
- ▶ *How:* Determine who will conduct evaluations and how you will deliver evaluation results to employees. Offer training in conducting evaluations to supervisors and mentors; a spirit of collaboration is most effective in a democratic workplace. Remain vigilant about confidentiality, even in a 360° system; the results of performance evaluations should be signed and filed in an employee’s confidential personnel file.
- ▶ *What next?* Discuss potential outcomes for good and bad results.

ASK YOURSELVES...

How often will we conduct evaluations?

Will we evaluate temporary or seasonal employees?

Who will have access to an employee’s evaluation?

Will evaluations be tied to raises or career advancement?

Will there be consequences for poor evaluations?

Who will have the authority to revise our evaluation forms and process?

YOUR COOP • Yearly Self-Evaluation Form

Self-evaluation is an opportunity to write or think about your job, review set new goals. Please use the following questions as a guide. Feel of paper and staple your answers to this page. Please sign your coo supervisor named below.

Employee: _____

Position: _____

Supervisor: _____

Comments due by: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions:

1. Describe your achievements as they relate to the establish responsibilities of the job. Describe what you achieved and h

2. What goals/responsibilities did you not meet?

Client Services Survey

Date: _____ Funding Source: _____

Client Name: _____ Team Leader: _____

Is the current schedule working for you? (days & hours)

Are the cares that are being done, meeting your needs? If not what could be changed?

1 = very dissatisfied 2 = dissatisfied 3 = satisfied 4 = very satisfied 5 = extremely satisfied

Caregiver(s) assigned to the home:

Dependable/timely	1 2 3 4 5	Dependable/timely	1 2 3 4 5
Properly trained	1 2 3 4 5	Properly trained	1 2 3 4 5
Feel safe	1 2 3 4 5	Feel safe	1 2 3 4 5
Overall rating	1 2 3 4 5	Overall rating	1 2 3 4 5

APPENDICES FOR THIS SECTION »

- 8. *Good Practices for Designing Coop Evaluation System.docx*
- 9. *DAWN Coop Peer Evaluation Form – Survey.dicx*
- 10. *DAWN Coop Peer Evaluation Form – Essay.docx*
- 11. *DAWN Coop Client Evaluation.docx*
- 12. *DAWN Coop Self-Evaluation Form.docx*


DISCIPLINE AND TERMINATION: RESPONDING TO UNDERPERFORMANCE

Formal, de-personalized disciplinary policies may seem ill-suited to the cooperative values at first glance. However, a transparent and consistent process can empower supervisors and mentors to do what's best for the coop. Your coop's disciplinary process should be tailored to your culture and management style, and it can still be humane and respectful.

In this toolkit we will focus on unsatisfactory work performance. Tools will include forms for discipline and termination. Remember that issues of workplace safety, sexual harassment and discrimination in particular require separate policies and procedures. Other forms of misconduct, such as theft of coop property or using drugs or alcohol on the job, may result in disciplinary action or immediate termination. Similarly, interpersonal conflicts may stem from performance concerns, but you should try to identify these and handle them separately. A Peer Advisor can be especially helpful in these cases, when coop members may have difficulty seeing the internal dynamics operating within their coop.

As always, be sure to explain the disciplinary procedure to all employees and train them how to use it before problems arise, ideally as part of a new employee orientation. All supervisors and mentors should also have access to their own supervisor, mentor, personnel committee or staff person for guidance and support in addressing

performance concerns. If a concern does warrant disciplinary action, schedule a private face-to-face meeting dedicated to the topic. We recommend that you protect check-ins as space for collaboration and do not issue discipline within a check-in or workplan meeting.



If you are using your other accountability tools effectively, you will address areas for improvement organically and routinely.

Let's explore four reasons why employees or colleagues might not meet your expectations:

1. Expectations are not clear
2. Expectations are not realistic and achievable
3. Employee lacks skills, information, training, or other resources needed to do the job
4. Employee chooses not to do the job

When you are addressing a performance concern, eliminate the first three options first.

1. Start with clear job descriptions, committee charters or project objectives to establish performance standards. You may be surprised how this simple step prompts employees to rise to your expectations.
2. Add regular workplans or check-ins to evaluate expectations and workload. These should be supportive, critical, and honest.
3. Once you have mutually determined that expectations are clear and reasonable, determine whether the employee has the skills and resources needed. If not,
 - ▶ Can you provide training, information, and other support? If you do opt to provide additional training, lay out the desired outcomes in terms of improved job performance.
 - ▶ Is it possible to reassign or transfer the employee to a position that is a better fit?

If you are using your other accountability tools effectively, you will address areas for improvement organically and routinely. When these fail to get results, or concerns start compounding, it is time to consider discipline. The need for discipline should not come as a surprise to the employee or mentor. Consider having a preliminary conversation with the employee in question before you invest the coop's time and energy in further disciplinary action. In some cases, you may feel the need to address a concern immediately, even in front of customers. You may not have access to a meeting room, or may simply prefer an informal talk to scheduling the meeting in advance. It can be appropriate and effective to pull an employee politely aside, or invite them to go for a walk, as long as you are discreet and respectful. Try: *"I want to talk to you because we have some concerns about your performance. We value you as an employee, but you are not meeting our needs. Would you like to continue to work for*

the coop?” In informal terms, this conversation boils down to: “This isn’t working for us. Is it working for you? Do you want to put some effort into making it work? If so, we are willing to invest in you.” If the answer is “no,” option number four is in effect. The employee is not motivated to meet your expectations. It is time to reassign the employee, ask for her or his resignation, or terminate employment. If the answer is “yes,” it is time to begin disciplinary proceedings.

ASK YOURSELVES...

Are our performance standards clear?	Do we have a grievance or appeals procedure?
Are our standards for employee conduct clear?	Who can decide if it’s time to discipline or fire an employee?
Do we have consequences for misconduct and underperformance?	Do we have a budget for on-the-job training?
Are we confident using them?	Do we have a mediation process for interpersonal conflicts?
How many times should we intervene?	Do we have policies for safety or sexual harassment policy?
Are we comfortable firing someone who isn’t doing their job?	Do we have a written non-discrimination policy?

Discipline

The practice of identifying and documenting performance concerns in workplans and performance evaluations helps a supervisor or mentor feel secure in the knowledge that discipline is warranted. A clear disciplinary path allows mentors and employees focus their energies on concerns and solutions, instead of process. Your coop may rely on conversations as opposed to forms, but you can still prepare for these difficult conversations with agendas or conversation guides. A good general rule for accountability is: Document Everything.

A good general rule for accountability is: Document Everything.

Many businesses and organizations use a system of “progressive discipline,” in which consequences get increasingly severe with repeat incidents. A “three strikes” rule is a simple example. Another common process consists of these steps:

1. *Write-up* or “*we’ve talked*” – this is the “we have concerns” conversation described above.
2. *Warning* – If your formal or informal “we’ve talked” does not produce results, move on to a formal warning. We have provided a sample warning form [13. DAWN Warning Form.doc]. Remember to focus on actions and behaviors, not personality or motivations. Consider identifying the consequences of additional warnings, or further incidents.
3. *Probation or suspension* – If your formal warning does not produce results, move on to probation or suspension. Probation and suspension both create a timeframe for improvements. They may create time for the coop to respond to the employee’s needs, as well as giving the employee time to improve performance. In either case, mentors must be clear about the results they would like to see, and establish a schedule for progress checks.
 - ▶ “Probation” refers to a period of monitoring and development. It may include reduced work



Recommending termination should be the last option in a line of interventions designed to give employees an opportunity to thrive.

hours or modified job duties. See our sample Probation Form template [14. *DAWN Probation Form.doc*], which includes expectations for the employee and supervisor.

► “Suspension” refers to a period in which the employee is removed from work completely. By definition, suspension does not include monitoring, and employees cannot demonstrate improvements in job performance during this time. Suspension is typically a response to misconduct as opposed to poor performance, but it can be an appropriate response in some situations.

- In some cases, a “leave of absence” may be another helpful option. These are generally voluntary on the part of the employee, as opposed to probation and suspension. A supervisor may recommend a leave of absence to allow the employee to address personal needs or other obligations outside of the workplace. As with probation and suspension, the areas of concern and desired outcomes must be clear. Your coop’s personnel policy should have guidelines for requesting and approving leaves of absence.

4. *Reassignment* (if applicable) – If probation or suspension still doesn’t yield the desired results, but you are not ready to terminate the employee, consider reassigning them to a different position. Reassignment in this context is a mandated, not voluntary, transfer. However, if the coop handles this decision respectfully, it can be a supportive, not punitive, measure.
5. *Termination* – A designated supervisor or mentor meets with the employee, and notifies them that their employment is terminated.

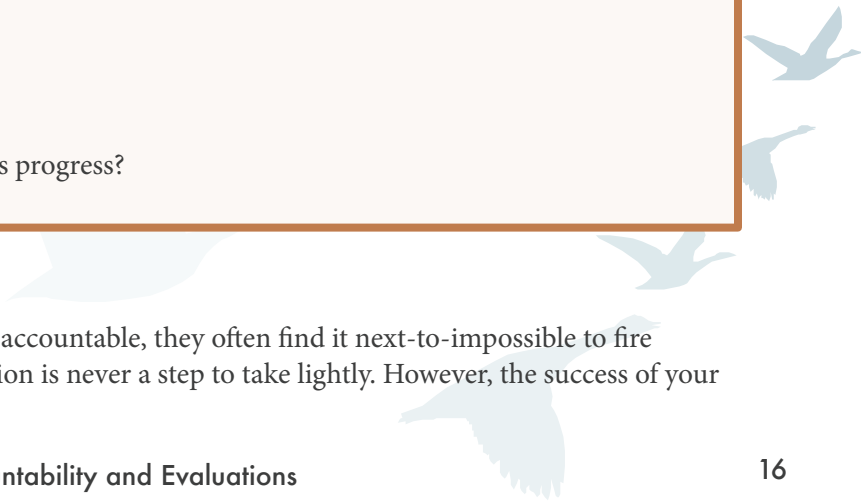
As with evaluations, details about disciplinary actions, leaves of absence and reassignments should be confidential, in accordance with the management structure of your coop. However, it may be appropriate for supervisors to disclose the broad outlines of leaves, suspensions, or reassignments. Some coops may also issue general reports to the Board of Directors or members, i.e., “The Personnel Committee issued three warnings and one suspension for unsatisfactory work performance last quarter.” This provides oversight without compromising confidentiality.

ASK YOURSELVES...

- When might a suspension be a more effective response than probation?
- When would a leave of absence be a good response?
- Will an employee be paid during a leave of absence?
- Will an employee on leave or suspension still accrue benefits?
- Will they have access to company property?
- How will we measure improvements?
- When will we check in to review the employee’s progress?

Termination

If worker-owners find it difficult to hold each other accountable, they often find it next-to-impossible to fire someone, especially a peer and co-owner. Termination is never a step to take lightly. However, the success of your



coop may depend upon removing employees who are not meeting the coop's needs. Supervisors need to act when an employee's performance is negatively affecting the community or the business. Recommending termination should be the last option in a line of interventions designed to give employees an opportunity to thrive.

We are providing a sample termination checklist, focusing on termination due to performance concerns, and helping your coop evaluate your employee development practices [15. *DAWN Termination Checklist.doc*]. Upon termination, you will need to address additional financial, administrative and housekeeping items. Identifying these in advance will prepare supervisors for termination and take some of the stress out of a stressful situation. We reiterate that it is important to consult a lawyer, your union, or your local Department of Labor regarding your termination policy and practices, especially regarding unemployment compensation, and extension of health benefits.

ASK YOURSELVES...

When do we cash out an employee's internal capital account?

Do we have the capacity to conduct exit interviews?

APPENDICES FOR THIS SECTION »

13. DAWN Warning Form.doc

14. DAWN Probation Form.doc

15. DAWN Termination Checklist.doc

This toolkit was designed to make accountability and evaluations empowering, not intimidating. We hope these tools help worker cooperatives and democratic workplaces continue to create meaningful jobs for workers and members. We invite you to share your experiences and tools with us.



5. WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

In order to create and maintain a meaningful system of accountability in your coop, the following documents, policies, and trainings should be in place. If you need further assistance, DAWN Peer Advisors can provide guidance, resources and referrals.

- ▶ Cooperative mission, vision, and/or values statement(s)
- ▶ Organizational chart
- ▶ Clear expectations:
 - » Job descriptions for staff and volunteer positions
 - » Codes of conduct and ethics for employees and/or Board of Directors
 - » Member Rights and Responsibilities
 - » Committee Charters
- ▶ Personnel policy, including:
 - » Evaluation procedure
 - » Disciplinary procedure
 - » Grievance procedure
 - » Resignation/termination checklist
- ▶ Compensation philosophy and wage/salary structure
- ▶ Orientation and training checklist for new employees, including:
 - » Training in facilitating and participating meetings
 - » Communication skills trainings: active listening, constructive criticism
 - » Anti-oppression, anti-racism or critical cultural competency trainings
 - » Conflict resolution and/or mediation training
- ▶ Training plan for new supervisors



6. ABOUT DAWN...

ORGANIZING TO MEET A NEED

Interest in worker cooperatives and cooperative development is growing. At the same time, many groups interested in the cooperative model have little familiarity with actual cooperative practices. There is a great need for experienced voices to help guide the plans and projects of those exploring worker cooperatives, to help them set up effective systems, structures and processes. This is where DAWN comes in.

Worker cooperatives have always relied on each other informally for technical assistance, models, advice and small loans. We have created a variety of places to exchange information and build skills: local federations; local, regional and national conferences; phone calls and in-person visits; and active financial and technical support for startup projects from established workplaces. The creation of the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives was in part motivated by a desire to formalize and grow this already existing network of support. Building on existing relationships and projects, we are now poised to create and coordinate a national network of homegrown experts.

And these homegrown experts exist! After years of growth in worker cooperatives, there is a new generation of experienced worker-cooperators who are dynamic, motivated and interested in sharing their expertise and providing peer technical assistance to worker-owned businesses and startups. DAWN coordinates this pool of energetic and talented worker cooperators, trains and prepares them to provide effective assistance, and helps build a national support system that enables them to work together for maximum effect.

A PROFESSIONAL PEER NETWORK FOR DEMOCRATIC BUSINESSES

The Democracy at Work Network (DAWN) is a network of certified peer advisors, all with strong social and professional ties, who cooperate in training themselves and providing technical assistance services to worker cooperatives. Our goals are to

- meet the demand for technical assistance and development advice with high-quality services, and
- increase worker cooperative technical assistance capacity from inside the movement.

Worker cooperatives, like all small businesses, require professional services to support the creation and functioning of their business. Due to the specialized nature of worker ownership, they also require specialized assistance in setting up financial, governance, operations, and decision-making structures, as well as training in democratic management. DAWN is organizing to meet these needs.

OUR PRINCIPLES

(1) We Build from Within

The Network aims to cultivate technical assistance providers from within the pool of experienced worker cooperators. We believe that this approach itself strengthens existing worker cooperatives by:

- increasing the expertise and engagement of current worker cooperators
- helping us retain talented and dedicated workers in the movement
- supplementing and reducing reliance on outside providers
- ensuring that this new initiative is sustainable and scalable to the resources available.

(2) We Value Experience

We believe that one of the most important and effective areas of expertise a consultant can bring to worker cooperative development and support is experience actually working in a democratic workplace. All other areas of knowledge, expertise and experience are informed by this fundamental grounding in democratic principles and practice.

(3) We Take a Broad Approach

The needs of each organization, community, cooperative and workplace are shaped by its workers, its industry, its location and a variety of other factors. Peer consultants, though equipped with standards and best practices, will not approach projects with a one-size-fits-all model, rather they will bring a breadth of models and experience to inform their clients' decisions.

(4) We Work Locally

We believe that technical assistance and worker cooperative development support are most effective when provided at a local level by people familiar with local markets, laws, practices, and cultural norms. We will therefore give priority to local providers and will make every effort to coordinate the network through local and regional organizations.

(5) Our Approach is Critically Inclusive

We believe that cooperative development work is social change work and that the process of democratic self-governance is fundamentally transformative. We understand that effective cooperation demands not just a respect for all voices but a critical awareness of power and the dynamics that keep some voices unheard. We therefore bring the power analysis developed by anti-racist trainers to the work of cooperative development.

(6) We Train the Trainers

We believe that every worker cooperator, every recipient of peer technical assistance, is a potential source of support and technical assistance for others in their cooperative and beyond. Therefore our training approach treats the trainee as a potential trainer, assumes that the training will be passed along to others down the line, and gives the tools to do so.

(7) We Are Open Source

We are committed to sharing information. The documents and processes that we produce within the Peer Technical Assistance project are not proprietary, instead they become part of free information and free culture.

(8) We Create, Then Evaluate

We understand that ongoing evaluation of ourselves, our capacity and our working relationships is critical. We model this self-reflexivity as a group, and we emphasize it to others when we provide support.

(9) We Share the Seven Cooperative Principles

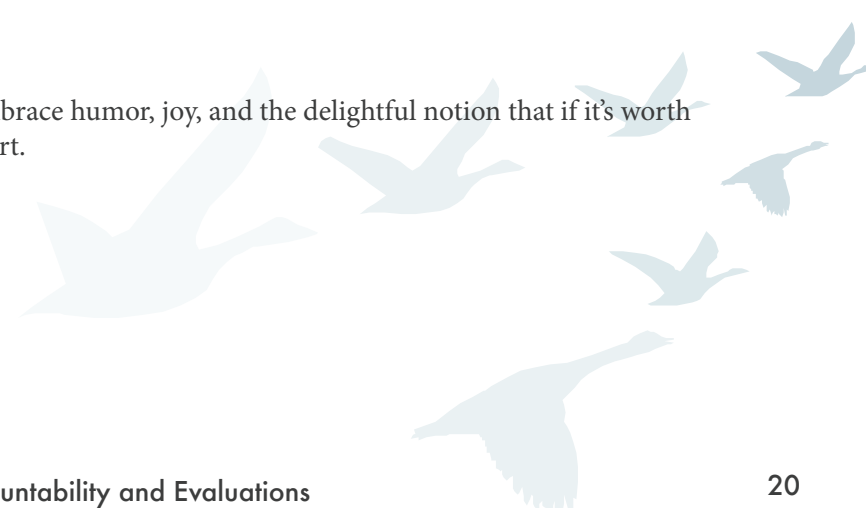
As experienced worker cooperators, we have a practical lived (and worked) experience of the Seven Cooperative Principles, and we bring this understanding and commitment to our consulting work. These principles inform our technical assistance provision, and we will share them with those unfamiliar with them, explain and discuss them, and refer to them as our guide.

(10) We Share the Madison Principles

As people involved in supporting cooperative development, we agree to follow the ethical standards and practices codified in the Madison Principles.

(11) We Have Fun

We are committed to lightening up a little! We embrace humor, joy, and the delightful notion that if it's worth doing, it's worth doing with a smile and a light heart.



7. CREDITS:

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SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATIONS

A TOOLKIT FOR WORKER COOPERATIVES AND DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES

By Alison Booth Gribas and Stacey Cordeiro