

Anecdotal evidence implies that there may be additional sources of job satisfaction among program directors and teachers of parent cooperatives. Rose Selesnick, former program director of Crestwood Hills Nursery School explains: "The reason that I prefer co-ops is because I find it very exciting to work with child development and adult development at the same time. There is no other area that I can think of where you're doing that simultaneously."<sup>5</sup>

Rachel Graves, who has been program director of University Parents Nursery School in Los Angeles for more than 8 years, compares her experience in a traditional program: "The difference is like night and day. Here parents are more concerned about their children, I love parent help and support. I love co-ops: it's the best way to have your child in school."<sup>6</sup>

Beverly Slocum, who was introduced to co-ops as a parent-member, was a teacher for 4 years at Sierra Madre Preschool in California, and has been program director there for more than 12 years, acknowledges that the job is not easy:

*It is a lot of work! But there are rewards. It's kind of the more you put into something, the more you get out of it. I develop relationships with the parents as well as the children. I think that there is a definite richness to the co-op program because parents add their own interest and abilities. For the child, the parent's role is an indication of the child's importance. What parents learn is internalized; it is brought home and practiced at home.<sup>7</sup>*

One co-op teacher explained that she began her work at the co-op with apprehension: "I have been doing this work for 28 years, but this is my first co-op. In the beginning I thought it would be awkward. I was surprised to find that I like the co-op. Parents bring a lot to the program. I get a lot of support and I can see how it benefits the children."<sup>8</sup>

Because parent interaction with staff is woven into the cooperative structure, feedback is ongoing and immediate: for cooperative directors

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5. The Co-op Experience, 2000.

6. Coontz, 1999. Interviews with directors and teachers who compare their experiences in the co-op and more traditional programs often view co-op parents as more concerned about their children. This perception may be influenced by the direct interaction staff have with parents in a co-op.

7. Telephone interview, March, 2003.

8. Coontz, 1999.

and teachers. Parents tend to have strong, positive feelings about them. Opinions like the following shared by El Cerrito Co-op parent-member Barbara Chan are common: "... The teachers have all been here a long time, they are wonderful — a wealth of information."<sup>9</sup>

Since 1953, the annual conference of The California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools has offered opportunities for co-op staff and parents throughout the state to attend workshops, share ideas, network, and to recognize the contributions of program directors and teachers. Parents express their appreciation to about 10 teachers or program directors each year with awards for outstanding service. Nominations for the award are submitted to an awards committee and must include at least 25 letters of endorsement for consideration. The affection of parents is clear as statements from the endorsements are shared during the awards ceremony and honorees are presented with a certificate and a memory book.

### **Requirements of the Program Director**

Each state (and some cities, towns, and counties) dictates child care licensing criteria that include minimum education and experience requirements related to administration and child development. The program director of the parent cooperative needs to be skillful at administering programs and delivering quality services for children, as well as deft at communication and leadership.

Although the program director shoulders most of the responsibility for guiding and supervising parents while they participate in the classroom, in many programs, especially larger programs, classroom teachers are also intimately involved with parents. The program director of a large cooperative has the added responsibility of helping teachers deal effectively with parents and mediate conflicts that may arise between them.

#### ***Expertise in Child Development and Education***

The program director has education and experience that demonstrate extensive knowledge about education and developmental characteristics of the age group of children involved in the program. This knowledge extends to recognizing and respecting cultural and other differences. The teaching element involved in the parent cooperative requires that the program director be confident, mature, and skilled at communicating with adults and children.

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9. Telephone interview, September, 1994.

**Personal Characteristics**

The program director of a parent cooperative has a commitment to and genuinely values the parent cooperative model. S/he is enthusiastic and skilled at working with children, adults, and groups. The program director is focused on the welfare of the group, yet is sensitive to the needs of individual children and parents. This balance requires confidence, a self-awareness about her/his professional strengths and weaknesses, as well as a commitment to professional growth.

**Administrative Skills**

The program director reports to the cooperative's board of directors and is charged with implementing policies established by the board. The program director must be able to administer a good quality program for children that includes parents. This includes the ability to manage budgets, hire and supervise staff, coordinate and direct parent volunteers, as well as direct an ongoing parent-education program.

Professional involvement of the program director and teachers can benefit the cooperative. The program director and, if financially possible, teachers should be encouraged to participate in parent cooperative and childhood education associations. The cooperative can encourage such professional activity by including a professional development category in the annual core budget to pay for memberships, conference fees, and travel expenses, and to fund substitutes when the program director or teacher(s) attend professional meetings. Professional development brings in new ideas, boosts staff morale, and enhances the cooperative's connection to professional organizations.

**Board of Directors in the Parent Cooperative**

The cooperative strives to maintain a delicate balance of power and responsibility among the program director, the members, and the board of directors. The program director manages day-to-day activities. The members participate in the cooperative and elect a board of directors. The board of directors has the legal authority and responsibility to guide the cooperative by monitoring co-op affairs, ensuring sound management, and establishing policies and plans. This guidance requires reviewing financial records and ensuring that the co-op follows its bylaws and operates in accordance with established policies and appropriate regulations. It requires the ability to evaluate the performance of the program director and institute long- and short-term strategic planning. A board appraisal form that includes a comprehensive list of primary board responsibilities can be found in Feature 18.

The primary responsibility of the board of directors is to ensure that the interests of the cooperative and the members are protected. Board members need to be aware that legal responsibilities are tied to the position. Incorporation of the cooperative insulates board members from personal liability as long as they reasonably attend to the legal responsibilities of *duty of loyalty* and *duty of care*.

### **Legal Responsibilities**

***Duty of loyalty*** means that decisions made by the board of directors are made in the best interests of the cooperative. Decisions about finances, staffing, policies, and planning must be focused only on the cooperative and its mission.

***Duty of care*** refers to carrying out the job of a board member in a careful, diligent manner. The law uses the "prudent person's standard" as a measurement for this diligence. This is legally defined as making decisions *including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person in a like position would use under similar circumstances*.<sup>10</sup> Some people find this easier to understand by substituting the word "careful" for prudent. This standard is attained by regularly attending and participating in board meetings, asking questions, carefully reviewing budgets and expenditures, and relying on responsible experts for advice. The prudent person's standard recognizes that board members are not experts but are capable of judging when an expert is needed to advise the board on important issues.

Specific responsibilities under the heading of *duty of care* include:

- Hire, supervise, and assure the performance of the program director. To be effective in this role, the board must maintain a professional and positive relationship with the program director and facilitate a supportive environment conducive to success while balancing these responsibilities with accountability assurance.
- Ensure organizational planning and policies consistent with the cooperative's mission. The cooperative is accountable to the membership and ensures that the best interests of children and parents are served.
- Financial Accountability. The board looks after the financial interests of the cooperative by approving budgets that provide adequate operational resources, examines financial statements to ensure that resources are effectively managed, and plans for the long-term financial viability of the cooperative.

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10. Zovickian, 1999, p. 4.

### **Strategies to Ensure Board Effectiveness**

Because board and general membership turnover are high in parent cooperatives, it is especially important to institutionalize strategies to maintain board continuity and effectiveness.

#### **Outside Board Members**

It can be helpful to have one or two board positions reserved for past members, or community members who understand the cooperative or have other expertise (e.g., child development, business, education). Outside members can add perspective, particularly where members may get entrenched or overwhelmed.

#### **Easing Board Transition**

Each board position should maintain a notebook that includes the cooperative's bylaws, a position description, and annual reports from those previously holding the position. The board should stress the importance of each board member submitting a summary, list, or outline of their activities in the position for the year they served.

In addition to the binder, the cooperative can institute some kind of transition that allows the person leaving the board position to meet and share information with the person new to the position.

One southern California cooperative holds an annual "board and committee turnover night" at the beginning of the cooperative's fiscal year in September. The evening is one of very few social events without children. It begins with one-on-one meetings between the person exiting a board or committee chair position and the person entering it. The "exiter" gives the "enterer" the notebook and other materials and shares information about the job. A brief, formal meeting of new and exiting board members follows, and the person leaving the position is thanked and encouraged to publicly share one story or piece of wisdom with the new board. The evening ends with socializing and celebration.

#### **Board Education**

The education of board members requires three items that are usually in short supply — time, money, and attention. As boards make out their annual calendars, these three items provide quick rationalizations for forgoing board education. But education is very similar to other planning — packing an umbrella in April "in case it rains," pruning the roses in the winter, or calling ahead to reserve a rental car — they may or may not reap immediate benefits, but in the long run these habits will ensure the benefits of a dry suit, beautiful spring blossoms, and reduced travel hassles.

Board education should be an annual institution scheduled close to the time that a new board takes office. Essential education topics include clarification of the board's roles and responsibilities, communication skills, policy and decision-making strategies, and effective planning. Board education can help boards run more efficient meetings and gain strategies that help the productivity of the cooperative.

One northern California co-op used the evaluation and planning skills gained from board education to evaluate their program. The co-op was considering ending their toddler program because it consistently operated at a slight deficit. As board members discussed the issue, they carefully examined the potential ramifications of closing the program. In the past, they had rationalized keeping the program open because they thought it might be a draw into their more financially successful preschool and pre-kindergarten programs. A thorough investigation revealed very clear linkages between the toddler program and the success of the other programs. With few exceptions, parents who entered with toddlers remained in the co-op until their children were too old to attend. They were among the most active and devoted members of the co-op and also "sold" the program to their friends, who joined the preschool-aged program. An evaluation over time revealed that this was a consistent pattern.

### **Assessing the Cooperative's Financial Condition**

Board members are responsible for assuring the financial health of the business portion of the cooperative and for making appropriate decisions if there are signs of problems. Board members can rely on experts — the program director, bookkeeper, and accountant — to assemble and present data. They can also assume that the information is accurate. However, members must be able to understand the basics of financial statements to be able to review the results being presented and detect major flaws or inaccuracies. This section does not include detailed instruction in reviewing statements but presents and defines the key financial statements and financial terms.

There are three primary financial sheets that the board will probably review:

1. The **Profit and Loss Statement** shows all income and expenses over a specific period, for example from April 1 to May 1. The statement will normally be divided into three sections:

- A. The *income* section will categorize sources of income and indicate how much revenue was obtained from each category. For example, there will be income from monthly fees, a fundraiser held during that month, and income from any other sales.
  - B. The *expense* section will list expenses by category, such as wages, payroll taxes, staff training costs, rent, utilities, etc.
  - C. The third section will list *other sources of income and expenses*. This could include interest from accounts or payment of taxes.
2. The **Cash Flow Statement** is used to make predictions about future income and expenses. The cash flow sheet displays the turnover of cash that can be used to pay current debt. The statement shows income, cash flow from investments, and cash from financing (what is brought in from loans). The amounts are reconciled to indicate beginning and end cash flow.
3. The **Balance Sheet** summarizes all finances of the cooperative for a fixed date. The statement will include all assets (current and fixed), liabilities, and equity. It is a useful snapshot picture of what the cooperative has and owes.
- A. Assets are what the cooperative has.
    - *Current assets* include cash, or what can be quickly changed into cash, including cash in the bank, accounts receivable, and merchandise inventories.
    - *Fixed assets* are items of worth that will be used by the business for a long time, including land, buildings, furniture, and equipment.
    - *Deferred assets* are prepaid expenditures. Items that have been purchased now for a service or product that will benefit the cooperative in the future.
  - B. Liabilities are what the cooperative owes — they are the cooperative's debts.
    - *Current liabilities* include all debts that are immediately due, or must be paid within 1 year.
    - *Accrued liabilities*, or expenses, are debts owed by the cooperative for services that have not yet been billed.

The income statement, cash flow statement, and balance sheet need to be reviewed together to understand the financial condition of the cooperative. Each of the three financial reports reveals an important perspective. The balance sheet provides an important overview and summary, but without the details provided by the profit and loss and cash flow reports, important details are missing.

### **Financial Safeguards**

Policies and careful business practices can protect the cooperative against unfortunate financial loss resulting from mistakes and dishonesty. Such financial safeguards require diligence, but minimal time and effort.

One West Coast parent cooperative had financial safeguards in place, but failure to adhere to them caused the cooperative to needlessly lose funds. In this cooperative, one board member's job included oversight of the treasurer. The treasurer had a medical emergency and the board member charged with oversight volunteered to take over financial management while the treasurer recuperated. When this occurred, the safeguard was eliminated. The board member cashed counter checks at the bank and even paid some personal bills with a preschool check. When the treasurer felt well again, she went into the bank and the bank teller suggested that there were some irregularities that should probably be looked into.

Another West Coast co-op lost money when the treasurer failed to pay payroll taxes because she wanted to make sure that the school had enough money to purchase the play equipment her husband was selling to the school. When a certified letter from IRS arrived at the school the treasurer happened to be on vacation, so the president opened the letter. This is how the cooperative learned that payroll taxes had remained unpaid for almost a year.

Hiring a bookkeeper and bonding individuals who handle funds can help with these situations, but they do not alleviate the need for safeguards. The following strategies can help safeguard against problems:

1. Require two signatures on all checks.
2. Insist that mail be routinely opened by someone other than the treasurer.
3. Board members should carefully review financial reports before meetings.
4. Conduct an annual financial audit.

### **Basics of Effective Board and Member Meetings**

Cooperative board meetings are usually held monthly, although it is not uncommon for the board to forgo meetings in December and July. The length of a meeting is not an indicator of its success, productivity, or commitment. Education, planning, and good facilitation can assure



that more is accomplished in a shorter time. Punctuality and refreshments can make meetings more pleasant for everyone.

### **Some General Components of Good Meetings**

- Good facilitation.
- Commonly understood goals.
- Participants feel the decisions are their decisions.
- High level of enthusiasm.

### **Plan the Meeting**

Distribute a meeting reminder, agenda, minutes from the previous meeting, treasurer's report, and other support documents at least 2 days before the meeting (or according to bylaw specifications). On the meeting agenda, insert approximate times to spend on each item. In general, it's best to limit meetings to under 2 hours.

### **Keep the Meeting Moving, on Track, and on Time**

Call the meeting to order on time. Begin by reviewing the agenda and meeting goals. Keep the agenda moving. If a discussion wanders off the topic, remind the group of the agenda item being discussed and the objective for the discussion. If the group doesn't have enough information, cut off discussion and ask for suggestions for how to provide follow-up on the topic so that the group can make a decision at a subsequent meeting. Before voting on an issue, clearly state the motion or proposal.

### **Bring Out Opinions and Encourage Participation**

Keep the discussion on the topic but encourage participation. Ask people to speak for themselves and to be specific. Discourage statements like, "Some people seem to feel ...," or "What s/he is trying to say is ...."

Encourage the expression of various points of view. Call attention to disagreements. When handled forthrightly, differences of opinion can yield creative solutions. Make sure that a few people don't monopolize the meeting. Encourage open discussion that allows for disagreement on issues, but don't tolerate attacks on individuals.

If the agenda is taking longer than anticipated, decide as a group how to proceed — to extend the meeting or to reschedule some agenda items to the next meeting.

Conclude the meeting on a note of achievement. Remind participants of the actions taken and decisions made. Close by reminding the group of follow-up needed and of the next meeting date, time, and location.

## FEATURE 18

### BOARD APPRAISAL FORM<sup>11</sup>

#### 1. Board Operations: To maintain a board that operates effectively

Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Organization Chart</i>	A chart has been established for the board.				
	A chart has been established for program staff.				
	The charts have been reviewed during the year.				
<i>b. Position Descriptions</i>	Have been established for the board.				
	Have been reviewed and updated during the year.				
<i>c. Organization</i>	Board executive positions have been elected.				
<i>d. Meeting Agenda</i>	Prepared by president and program director.				
	Priority items identified.				
	Proposed timing indicated.				
	Each board member has a copy in advance.				
<i>e. Board Reports (e.g., minutes, treasurer's report)</i>	In writing.				
	Appropriate length.				
	Content adequate for appraising progress.				
	Sent to each director prior to board meeting.				
<i>f. Board Member Attendance</i>	Each director attends at least 90% of the meetings.				
	President informed when board member is absent.				
<i>g. Participation in Meetings</i>	Each director participates in discussion.				
	Each director contributes to the productivity of the meetings.				
<i>h. Meeting Procedures</i>	Adequate use made of formal (parliamentary) procedures.				
	Decisions are made as needed.				
	Meetings are of right length.				
<i>i. Board Calendar</i>	Calendar of board activities approved and each board member has a copy.				
<i>j. Board Manual/Binder</i>	Each board member has a copy of the board manual.				
	Manual is updated with policies, bylaws, and job descriptions.				

#### 2. Program Director and Staff: To assure board oversight and evaluation of program director

Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Job Description for Program Director</i>	Is established in writing—board members and the director have copies.				
	Reviewed by program director and board during the year.				
<i>b. Work Plan for Program Director</i>	Work plan and annual goals have been prepared by the program director.				
	Approved by the board early in the year.				

\* DK = Don't know.

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11. Although extensive efforts were made to identify the original source of this form, its author remains unknown. The form was adapted by this author to apply to parent cooperatives.

Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>c. Evaluation of Program Director</i>	Have considered results of cooperative member annual evaluation.				
	Have considered goals agreed to at the beginning of the year.				
	After discussion, the evaluation was prepared and approved by the board in its final written form.				
	Written evaluation was presented to the program director by the president or other board designee, and program director was given an opportunity to discuss and ask questions.				
<i>d. Program Director Compensation</i>	Board has reviewed established policy on compensation and modified if necessary.				
	Compensation package is consistent with policy and has been approved.				
<i>e. Education/Training &amp; Development for Program Director</i>	Composed of a plan (including conference participation, membership, and participation in applicable associations), and a budget is approved by the board.				
<i>f. Staff Compensation &amp; Education/Training</i>	Board has reviewed and approved staff compensation and development and training plan prepared by program director.				

**3. Legal Responsibilities: To direct affairs of the organization within the guidelines provided by the articles of incorporation, bylaws, and any regulations governing the organization.**

Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. The Articles of Incorporation</i>	Each director has a copy.				
	Reviewed by the board during the year.				
<i>b. Bylaws</i>	Each director has a copy.				
	Reviewed by the board during the year.				
<i>c. Minutes</i>	Carefully checked by the board.				
	Approved and signed at each meeting.				
<i>d. Conflict of Interest</i>	Directors understand the concept of "conflict of interest."				
	Any conflict or potential conflict is declared.				
	Board member abstains from discussion and voting when there is a conflict of interest.				
<i>e. Legal Responsibilities</i>	Legal responsibilities of the board are clearly understood.				

**4. Financial: To establish financial plans and policies and to monitor the organization's operations for soundness and stability.**

Key Indicators	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Policies</i>	Financial policies reviewed and updated.				
<i>b. Budgets</i>	Capital and operating budgets approved annually.				
<i>c. Financial Ratios</i>	Goals for important financial ratios are established.				
<i>d. Member Fees</i>	Fees for service have been reviewed considering comparisons with other community programs and budgets.				

\* DK = Don't know.

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Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>e. Member Participation Requirements</i>	Established parent participation policies have been reviewed and modified, if needed.				
	Specific requirements have been reviewed considering member evaluations, policy, and budgets.				
<i>f. Comparisons of Progress with Goals</i>	Reports permit comparing progress with goals established.				
<i>g. Corrective Action</i>	Reports indicate corrective action carried out.				
<i>h. Insurance</i>	Insurance programs reviewed and updated during the year.				
<i>i. Bonding</i>	Bonding program reviewed during the year.				
<i>j. Audit</i>	Audit report received and studied.				

**5. Comprehensive Planning: To approve the organization mission, the objectives and policy, major plans and programs, and capital and operating budgets.**

Key Indicators	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Statement of Mission &amp; Objectives</i>	Has been updated in the last 5 years.				
	Has been reviewed by the board in the past year.				
<i>b. Policies to Guide Decision-Making</i>	Have been updated in the past 3 years.				
	Have been reviewed by the board in the past year.				
<i>c. Major Programs</i>	Program goals reviewed and approved in each key performance area.				
<i>d. Budget</i>	Long-term capital and operating budgets reviewed and approved.				
<i>e. Short- &amp; Long-Term Plans</i>	Plans have been reviewed, updated, and approved.				
<i>f. Planning Calendar</i>	A planning calendar has been approved by the board.				

**6. Member Representation and Relations: To represent members in a trusteeship capacity, to maintain the democratic control structure, and to maintain a well-informed membership that participates effectively in the organization.**

Key Indicators	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Membership Meetings</i>	Meeting has a good balance of reporting on the past and planning for the future.				
	Meeting arrangements encourage member discussion and participation.				
<i>b. Evaluation by Members</i>	An annual member evaluation form is prepared that includes appraisal of program (e.g., hours, activities . . .), director, teachers, and board.				
	Reviewed annually before dissemination, and modified as needed.				
	Results that include written comments are compiled by designated board members or an outside organization.				
	Board has reviewed results.				
	A summary of evaluation results has been approved by board for inclusion in member newsletter.				

\* DK = Don't know.

Key Indicator	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>c. Board Selection</i>	A nominating committee solicits suggestions for nominations to the board.				
	The board is representative of the membership.				
<i>d. Communication with Stakeholders</i>	Board is informed of expressed needs of stakeholders.				
<i>e. Member &amp; Committee Communication</i>	Board has a list of committee chairs and committee members and committee plans and budgets.				
	Member newsletter is regularly distributed and includes a brief report about the board decisions (usually written by president).				
	Members have a board of directors list, and a list of committee chairs that includes contact information.				
	All financial information is available for member review.				

**7. Board of Director Development: To maintain a board that clearly understands its role and responsibilities, and effectively carries out its functions.**

Key Indicators	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Board Position Orientation</i>	Board members new to positions have had an opportunity to meet with outgoing members and provided with annual reports of activities.				
<i>b. Sources of Training</i>	Programs available for director training are reviewed.				
<i>c. Board Self-Assessment</i>	Each director assessed his/her training needs.				
<i>d. Board Education &amp; Budget</i>	A plan for board education, including budget, established for the year.				
	A beginning of term board education program was conducted with at least 90% of new board participating. The board president or delegate attended the entire session.				
	At least 50% of board members attended at least one board-related seminar during the past year.				

**8. Public Relations: To maintain effective relations with applicable child education organizations, other parent cooperatives, the community, and related government entities.**

Key Indicators	Criteria	Yes	Partly	No	DK*
<i>a. Child Education Organizations</i>	The cooperative is a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children or a similar organization, and the periodicals are available for on-location reading				
<i>b. Other Parent Cooperatives</i>	The cooperative has identified and regularly communicates with geographically close cooperatives, and at least one parent cooperative association.				
<i>c. Community</i>	The cooperative maintains contact with child-related organizations, and relevant business agencies and associations				
	Objectives and policies have been established to guide the co-op's social contribution to the community.				
<i>d. Government</i>	Board is aware of relevant activities planned by local government.				

\* DK = Don't know.

### **Effectively Dealing with Disruptive Behavior**

The best way to deal with disruptive behavior is to implement strategies to avoid its occurrence. Get general agreement on the agenda before the meeting. Begin the first board meeting of the year by having the group establish ground rules (for example: no interruptions, allow everyone to participate, be brief...). Display or restate these rules at the beginning of subsequent meetings.

If disruptive behavior occurs, note whether the person's comments are off track, and repeat the goals of the meeting ("That's an interesting point, but we've agreed to focus today on..."). If one or two people are dominating the discussion, explain the importance of group participation and call on others to give comments. If there is a consistent problem with certain people, encourage all participants to point out distracting behavior.

If necessary, take short breaks to relieve tension. Form small committees to deal with specific problems or issues instead of using valuable group time.

### **The Mission Statement**

A mission statement is a clear, concise declaration of the purpose of the co-op. It serves a variety of crucial functions. It is a valuable public relations tool because it introduces the co-op to the press, the community, and prospective members. The mission statement also serves an important internal function — it guides policy decisions for the co-op board, staff, and membership. The mission statement should be used in brochures, promotional materials, and be included in press releases and outside funding applications.

A strong mission statement is especially important to preschool and child care cooperatives because of membership turnover. It helps guide and empower board, member, and staff decisions. When distractions cause members to become absorbed in peripheral matters, the mission statement remains an explicit reminder of the central concerns of the co-op.

The mission statement should incorporate the objectives of the organization into a clear, succinct one or two paragraphs. The statement should be motivating and powerful enough to inspire a resounding "yes" from the membership, yet not so lofty that members don't feel a part of it. It should be timeless, yet conjure up a picture of the program that contains vision and focuses on valued outcomes.

**Sample mission statement:**

*New Discoveries Cooperative Child Care Center is a non-profit parent cooperative dedicated to providing quality child care in a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment. The center celebrates children by meeting their developmental needs, respecting each child's uniqueness, and encouraging each to discover, explore, and shape their own distinct perspective on the world. The cooperative structure of New Discoveries emphasizes parent involvement and building support systems for families, reinforcing the belief that children are best cared for when families are cared about.*

**Setting Goals**

The mission statement guides the development of short- and long-term goals. A helpful process in setting goals is to make a list of the co-op's five greatest strengths and five greatest weaknesses. With special attention to maintaining the strengths, establish strategies for addressing the weaknesses. When strategies are established, be careful to set reachable goals.

For example, perhaps a weakness is the building — reports indicate that parents visiting the school are turned off by the way it looks. The rooms are too small and dark and the school looks dingy. Most board members agree that the best solution would be to tear the current building down and build another. But a realistic assessment of the costs and the short- and long-term potential of meeting them reveals that the ideal solution isn't feasible — even as a long-term goal. You may decide instead to schedule a painting party, rearrange the rooms to make them appear larger, and change the window dressings to let in more light.

**Checklist for Setting SMART Long- and Short-Term Goals.<sup>12</sup>**

- ✓ Is the statement **S**pecific?
- ✓ Will you be able to know how well you've met the goal — is it **M**easurable?
- ✓ Given the mission of your cooperative — is it **A**ppropriate?
- ✓ Assess whether you have the necessary resources accessible to you — is the goal **R**ealistic?
- ✓ Do you have a specific **T**ime-frame for the goal?

12. Kirby, 1994.

**Long-Term Goals** express the overall and specific objectives of the cooperative. The objectives must be consistent with the mission. Long-term goals for the parent cooperative involve goals that reach from 9 months to 5 years into the future.

**Short-Term Goals** include objectives that can be accomplished within 2 weeks to 9 months. They include steps that need to be accomplished to meet a long-term goal.

Once long- and short-term goals have been established, they should be assigned to committees or individuals. Establish a date or time period within which the goal should be accomplished. Committees or individuals will need to outline the specific tasks necessary to complete each goal.

#### **Sample Long-Term Goals**

1. Complete NAEYC accreditation by June of next year (1½ years from the anticipated accreditation starting date).
2. Double the current attendance at parent education meetings by June, 2 years from now, and maintain or increase this attendance level indefinitely.
3. Fill our program to capacity and establish a waiting list of at least 10 children within 3 years.
4. Completely renovate the existing play yard by June, 5 years from now.

#### **Sample Short-Term Goals (set in September)**

1. Take necessary steps to begin NAEYC accreditation process by October 1.
2. Organize a well-publicized parent-education program on discipline presented by a well-known person to be presented sometime during mid-November. Telephone parents and encourage them to attend the meeting.
3. Distribute a brief evaluation for feedback on the program and tally results.
4. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current program with an eye toward new-member recruitment. Discuss the evaluation results and how to proceed at the February board meeting.
  - a. Track all telephone inquiries to the co-op. Return answering machine messages within 24 hours. Ask callers where they heard about the co-op.
  - b. Complete a follow-up call to all people who visited the co-op. Ask: (1) what they liked and didn't like about the program and why they did or did not decide to enroll their child; (2) whether the



co-op's hours of operation met their needs. Prepare a record of the results for review at the February board meeting.

c. Distribute evaluation questionnaire to members by January 5.

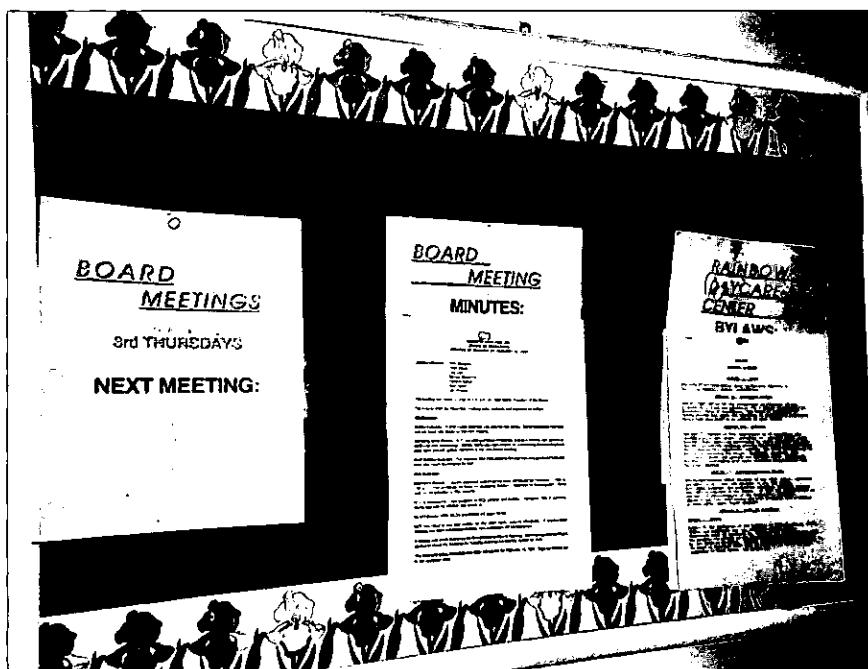
Compile results in time to review them at the February meeting.

5. Organize a work party of parents to paint and stabilize the south climbing structure by May 20.

### Members in the Parent Cooperative

Members play an active role in the parent cooperative. They serve on committees, participate in the program, and elect a board of directors that makes policy decisions, establishes fees, and decides how funds will be spent.

Each cooperative establishes parent-participation requirements for members. This often includes devoting a predetermined number of hours each week or month to the cooperative. Participation usually includes assisting teacher(s) in the classroom. Many schools offer participation alternatives for parents whose work obligations don't permit them to volunteer during program hours. Such alternatives can include early morning set up or preparatory work that can be completed at home,



Bulletin board at Rainbow Daycare in Sacramento, California displays important information for parent-members — a reminder of board meeting dates, minutes from the most recent board meeting, and the co-ops bylaws.

**FEATURE 19****WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE MEMBER HANDBOOK**

A clearly written, well-organized member handbook can be invaluable. Its tone should be welcoming and positive, yet straightforward. The handbook presents a professional image to parents, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and ultimately helps to minimize miscommunication problems and related issues. Some co-ops have parents sign a form saying that they have read and understand what is presented in the parent handbook.

**1. Welcome Statement**

Welcome parents to the co-op. Include a brief history of the program and the mission statement. Emphasize co-op!

**2. Table of Contents**

This helps parents to refer to specific sections when needed.

**3. Introduction**

Provide more information about the co-op — include that it is a non-profit parent co-op, licensing information, accreditation, or other distinction. Briefly introduce board structure and welcome members to meetings — state usual day, time, place.

**4. Program Philosophy and Curriculum**

State the overarching philosophical approach and the importance of parent involvement. Emphasize areas of age-appropriate child development. Provide examples for how the intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of children are addressed.

**5. Program Schedule**

Outline the structure of the school year (starting month, whether it is year-round or summer release with an optional summer session, etc.). Provide the schedule for a typical day; include any optional programs, such as extended child care or drop-in child care. Indicate policies for naps and toileting (if appropriate), snacks, and meals.

**6. Admissions Policies**

Indicate the earliest age of admission and any admission priorities (e.g., siblings of current members). Explain policies related to a waiting list.

**7. Registration and Fees**

List forms and health information needed for registration (these often include: identification and emergency information, physician's health evaluation, emergency medical consent, health history, immunization record, parent membership and tuition agreements).

Present information about program hours as they relate to fees, and list all specific fee categories (e.g., registration fee, tuition, music

program, extended day). Explain policies and procedures for payment schedule, late fees, returned checks, charges when a parent is late to pick up their child, etc. To make the handbook less time sensitive, specific fee categories may be listed with a reference to a supplemental sheet that lists specific fees.

#### **8. Parent-Participation Requirements**

Present a list of parent responsibilities, including classroom or related participation, co-op facility/grounds clean-up workdays, parent education, fundraising participation, and other expectations. If applicable, include information about the option of paying a higher fee to reduce participation requirements. Include instructions about participating in the classroom — when to arrive, what to do if you can't make your shift, how to check in and out. Point out expectations related to demeanor (such as, avoid excessive socializing with other parents in the classroom) and interactions with children (such as, safety is the primary concern).

#### **9. Withdrawal and Termination Information**

Indicate the amount of notice needed for withdrawing a child from the program and any penalties for leaving before the school year ends. State the reasons and process for being terminated from the program.

#### **10. Health and Safety Procedures**

Include a list of immunizations needed by age, policies for ill children (including to notify the school if a child is sick), a list of conditions that specifically warrant recuperating at home (e.g., fever, rash, communicable disease such as chicken pox). Present comments about general safety and first aid, and describe the disaster preparedness plan.

#### **11. All-Parent Events and Traditions**

Present a list and brief explanation for major traditional fundraising events, work parties, parent education, and parent orientation. Include a listing of traditional social events and community events that the cooperative is involved with.

#### **12. Board of Directors, Committees, and Jobs**

Include information about meetings and running for a position on the board of directors. Include a list and very brief description of all board positions, committees, and parent jobs.

#### **13. Communication**

Present the importance of communication and the various ways to gain information about the program. State the newsletter schedule, where notices are posted, and how and to whom concerns should be addressed.

administrative duties like routine bookkeeping, membership recruitment, or publicity. Some cooperatives allow members to delegate a portion of the parent-participation requirements to substitute caregivers, such as a relative or nanny. Some allow parents to reduce their participation requirements by paying a higher fee.

Parents are often required to attend a specified number of parent-education seminars each year. Some cooperatives vary the parent education by the age of their child. Others organize education on topics suggested by parents in a beginning-of-the-year survey.

Fundraising and routine maintenance of the facility and grounds (e.g., general clean-up of the facility and grounds; minor equipment maintenance or repair, painting of equipment or facility, etc.) are required of parents in most cooperatives.

### **Annual/Semiannual Evaluations**

Cooperative members should be surveyed at least once each year to evaluate the cooperative. The following topics should be included in the questionnaire: evaluation of program hours, fee and requirements, and assessments of the program director, staff, and the board.

A set of similar, multiple-choice questions should be included in the questionnaire each year, so that results can be compared over time. Include some open-ended questions and encourage respondents to include comments.

Results should be tallied by specified board members or an outside organization, not the program director or staff.

### **Parents and Education**

Learning is at the very core of the cooperative. Parents may be introduced to the developmental stages appropriate to their child and other issues during evening classes at the cooperative. They are able to observe the subtleties and rich textures of individual differences by observing children play. When parents help the teacher initiate an art activity they gain insights into the ways that young children learn. By observing the way a teacher gently encourages a child to use her own resources to solve a problem, parents learn healthy ways to encourage independence. Parent education in the cooperative is multifaceted — it involves listening, observing, and doing.

To Katharine Whiteside Taylor, the cooperative is essentially a center of learning — for the child, the parent, and for the teacher.

## FEATURE 20

### SAMPLE ANNUAL CO-OP PRESCHOOL EVALUATION

NOTE: Please return survey by: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the following using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents strongly disagree, and 5 represents strongly agree.

- |  | Disagree | Agree   |
|--|----------|---------|
| 1. My child's teachers know and care about my child and respond to her/his individual needs. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. The atmosphere at (name of co-op) is warm and nurturing. ...  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. My child is happy and safe at (name of co-op). ....   | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. My child learns important skills at (name of co-op). ....   | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I feel welcome to visit the school any time I wish. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. My child's teachers listen to me as a parent. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I can go to the staff with my concerns and feel confident that they will be addressed respectfully and promptly. ....   | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I am comfortable with the staff style and forms of setting limits for children. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. The <b>staff</b> communication system keeps me well informed about what is happening in the school each month and provides what I need to know to plan ahead. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I feel welcome to attend board meetings any time I wish to do so. ....   | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. The <b>board</b> communication system keeps me well informed about what is happening in the school each month and provides what I need to know to plan ahead. .... | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. Parent education programs are informative and worthwhile. ....   | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I would recommend this program to friends. ....  | 1        | 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. The parent participation requirements are (please mark one response):<br>__ about right; __ too few; __ too time consuming; __ unclear.                            |          |         |
| 15. The days and hours of my child's program are (please mark one response):<br>__ about right; __ too few; __ too many; __ Other/explain: _____                       |          |         |

Please take a few more minutes to complete the following (use a separate page if necessary):

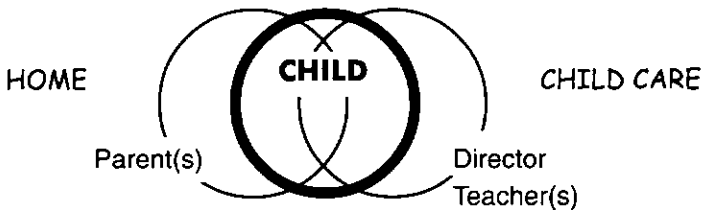
16. I could work better with staff if \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The program would better meet my needs if \_\_\_\_\_.
18. A recent incident that made me feel good about the program was \_\_\_\_\_.
19. A recent incident that made me unhappy about the program was \_\_\_\_\_.
20. When my child talks about (name of co-op) s/he says \_\_\_\_\_.
21. I wish my child's teacher would \_\_\_\_\_.
22. My child's teachers have helped me most by \_\_\_\_\_.
23. Please list any additional comments. \_\_\_\_\_.

**THANK YOU!**

She describes the teacher in the co-op preschool as a specialist in early child development who is usually especially knowledgeable about the needs and typical behavior to expect from 3 and 4 year olds. The parent in this program is a specialist in his or her particular 3 or 4 year old. Taylor asserts, "the mother can profit greatly by acquiring some of the teacher's general knowledge of children, and the teacher, in turn, needs the mother's knowledge of her own child's specific and unique responses."<sup>13</sup> The process is complete, according to Taylor:

*When both parents and teachers fully recognize and accept children as individual human beings with valid rights and potentialities ... they will recognize each other's contributions for what they are — indispensable elements in the child's all-around development.<sup>14</sup>*

The child becomes the primary beneficiary of this mutual sharing, as depicted in the following diagram:



**Diagram 1.** Parent involvement benefits the child by increasing the continuity of care between home and child care.

Newsletters and other documents disseminated are focused on information about the cooperative and topics pertinent to families and children. For example, the June 2002 issue of *Whales Tales*, the monthly newsletter of Tustin Community Preschool in California, includes a list of recommended children's books, an article entitled "Helping Children Feel Safe and Secure," and another on "Better Behavior." In addition to a calendar of co-op events and other co-op news, the October issue includes a list of local places to go and things to do with children, and the words to the Halloween songs the children will sing during the month.

The 35-page "Parent Handbook" for Unitarian Cooperative Preschool in San Diego includes a section entitled *Guidelines for Dealing with*

13. Taylor, 1981, p. 297.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

*Children in the Classroom.* The section begins by stating that the safety and physical welfare of children are paramount. It then proceeds to offer instructions and examples for common issues. One guideline says to phrase requests to children in a positive way, followed by the examples "Please sit on the chair," rather than "Don't stand on the chair," or "Please walk," rather than "Don't run."

It also instructs parents to avoid judgments and labeling of children, rather than saying "That's a bad boy," or "That's mean".... instead say, "That's not safe," or "Hitting hurts; use your hands for digging, painting ...."

Education classes at most cooperatives begin with a mandatory "orientation" held prior to the beginning of the program's fiscal year. The orientation discusses the cooperative's overriding learning philosophies, the cooperative's decision-making processes, and the roles and responsibilities of member, board member, and director/teacher. Some cooperatives present this information in a video. This information is continually reinforced in virtually all written materials.

Shortly after the program year begins, parents are usually required to take one or more evening or weekend classes focused on development issues appropriate to their child's age. The class may focus on common behaviors, effective interaction strategies, and how and when to



*Unitarian Co-op Preschool in San Diego, California*

intervene if a child's behavior is inappropriate. The class is an important foundation for classroom participation that has practical applications at home as well.

Throughout the year, parent education classes are offered on a variety of topics. Parents may be asked what types of classes they would be interested in prior to scheduling the topics. Beyond the age-specific training required at the beginning the year, the cooperative typically requires a minimum of classes, or hours, and allows parents to pick from among the classes offered. The cooperative should engage the program director, teachers, and community experts to teach the classes. Below is a sampling of class topics:

- Child discipline
- When children bite
- Balancing work and family
- Special program for fathers only
- Building child self-esteem and confidence
- Children's sleep patterns (or lack of!)
- Talking with children about: death/God/sex/divorce/race ...
- Bed wetting
- How children learn
- Preventing child obesity
- Sibling rivalry

As parents become involved in organizing fundraising events, developing public relations materials, setting school policies, and evaluating financial reports, the learning and responsibility become more diverse.

The following observation, made by Dr. Herbert R. Stolz in 1930, is still relevant today:

*The experience of these mothers emphasizes the vital connection between responsibility and growth. Discussion and demonstration are preliminary, and any program of parent education which does not result in the practice of responsibility is but looking over the threshold into the promised land of education. Cooperation in responsibility adds significance to the exacting routine of child nurture and gives an exhilaration to the participants which has a far-reaching effect upon their relations with children and with adults.<sup>15</sup>*

Parent education in the cooperative is especially effective because many educational mediums are utilized. Classes on child development and related issues offer formal education. The most powerful parenting education is gained through classroom participation and program

15. Taylor, 1981, p. 169.



involvement. This gives parents the opportunity to study child behavior, observe interactions modeled by the program director and teachers, and to "practice" modeled behavior that they have learned in formal classes and read about in program documents.

A tour of southern California co-ops yields an array of educational wall décor. At about a preschooler's eye level are pictures and trimmings for young children. Gaze up to about an adult's eye level and many co-ops have signs strategically placed for participating parents. Near the art table, signs gently remind parents not to judge children's creations with comments like "pretty" or "good" by displaying comment suggestions — one sign says simply "look at all the colors in the picture," another says "see how the brush strokes make a pattern in the color," and a third says "can you tell me about your painting?" Other signs around the room are more general: "The work of children is play"; "Problem solving, negotiating, science experimentation all happen under the guise of play." One in particular however, is most telling of the co-op experience: "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand."

### **Funding the Cooperative**

Financing structures for parent cooperatives operate slightly differently from those of other cooperatives, in part because they are usually incorporated as charitable non-profit corporations. Rather than purchasing shares that provide equity capital and sharing in the proceeds of the business with patronage dividends (profit sharing), cooperative members design a program that operates at cost. Any surplus left in the cooperative at the end of the year is allocated to the cooperative for program enhancement or facility improvement.

Members of parent cooperatives usually pay fees based on their use of the cooperative's services. An initial registration fee is often charged. Many co-ops ask parents to sign agreements for an annual fee that is spread over the entire fiscal year. Other cooperatives set a monthly fee. Fees are almost always based on anticipated use in advance of services provided, and fees accrue whether or not the predetermined services are used.

Some co-ops add additional fees. For example, one school in Los Angeles charges an annual fee that is designated for board liability insurance. To encourage "parent service participation," another southern California co-op charges each family a participation fee that can be

paid in two installments. To receive the full fee back, a family must complete 25 hours of service over one school year. As soon as the full 25 hours of service are performed, members are instructed to notify the treasurer, who applies the balance toward a month's tuition or issues a refund.<sup>16</sup>

Most co-ops also have ongoing fundraisers. These activities involve raising cash, other than tuition, to benefit the child care or enrichment program. Although tuition is usually set at amounts that cover operating expenses, money generated from fundraising is generally used to purchase equipment, hold special events, or pay for special maintenance or supplies, but not daily operations.<sup>17</sup>

Although fundraising has the advantage of generating needed funds, it also has drawbacks. First, profits from any fundraising event can vary widely. Volunteers can work very hard at a fundraising event that doesn't generate any funds at all. A successful fundraising event will require an initial capital outlay, a good deal of planning, management, and coordination, as well as labor.

The foundation for a successful fundraising event is to select an activity that can achieve funding goals with the least amount of labor and capital. Some important considerations in evaluating a fundraising idea include:

- Is it appropriate for our cooperative or in our community? Pick an event that fits the culture of your particular co-op and is consistent with an organization that serves children and families.
- Carefully weigh the capital outlay and labor involved with the project's potential to contribute funds to the co-op.
- Leadership, organization, and parental support. Events must be led by an individual or committee committed to the organization or to other work required to make it successful. Members need to support the event enough to participate to the extent needed.

Most non-profit organizations have their share of stories of the "failed fundraiser." What follows is an example. A board member of one parent co-op was a sports buff with connections. She attended an exclusive function and purchased an item that included the signatures

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16. As noted in Chapter 4, this practice can be problematic if the fee is not set high enough and parents believe they have the option to forgo participation.

17. In reality, some small parent cooperatives use fundraising events to help with operating expenses.

of an entire major sports team. The team included well-recognized athletes who would be retiring. The item was offered for sale for a fraction of its worth so the board member purchased it. This was a dedicated board member who genuinely believed that the item could generate needed funds to the co-op.

At the next board meeting, she informed members of her purchase and said that she thought it could be a great fundraiser for the co-op. She did not obligate the co-op to purchase the sport memorabilia but suggested that the co-op could raise money by selling raffle tickets for the item. She offered to wait for reimbursement and to store the item until the fundraiser ended. The board voted to risk the \$2,000 the board member paid for the item and sell raffle tickets.

The event ended up losing money and generating some hard feelings. It was a specialty item that needed to be carefully handled. Unexpected problems arose because the co-op was unaware of the legal red tape and cumbersome reporting requirements relating to major raffles. These problems were compounded by the fact that no one from the co-op who was knowledgeable about the item and excited by the project took charge and carried it through to fruition.

Discussions with cooperative leaders, reviews of preschool newsletters, and feedback from state associations and Parent Cooperative Preschools International reveal that there are a multitude of creative, successful fundraising events held by cooperative preschools each year. Some of the most common fundraising ideas include auctions, sales of grocery or department store scrip, raffles, and special events. A more detailed sampling of fundraising ideas is included in Appendix 3.

Portuguese Bend Nursery School in San Pedro, California organizes a creative and profitable fundraising event. The annual "Kid-K-Run" is a one-mile run/walk community-wide event designed especially for children aged 3 to 13. Parents and others may also participate. In addition to funds from registration fees the co-op holds a raffle and sells food and T-shirts. Local businesses sponsor the event by contributing funds and donating items, thereby minimizing event expenses. The community-wide event is successful in helping the co-op earn money, gain recognition, and advocate for "encouraging physical fitness early in our children's lives as well as sharing the benefits of parent participation."<sup>18</sup>

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18. Quotation from event brochure.

## Parent Participation

Parent participation is central to co-ops. Los Angeles parent Karen Quintiliano says that parent participation was what drew her and her husband to University Parents Nursery School (UPNS) in Los Angeles. She feels that her experiences at the co-op help her to be a better parent: "Watching your child with other kids helps a lot. It's also good to observe other kids and their different temperaments; it helps to understand your own child better." Another UPNS parent adds that the co-op is an exceptional learning environment: "being here is really better than a parenting class."

Parent participation in cooperative preschools is designed to accomplish two goals. The primary goal is to facilitate parent involvement and education that strengthens families. The involvement helps strengthen family bonds by facilitating opportunities for parent-to-child educational interactions and creating supportive networks of families with similar values. The second goal of parent involvement is usually to reduce the cost of the program. When parents contribute labor, the co-op is able to reduce costs to parents and reallocate funding toward improving programs.

When participation requirements are established and reviewed annually, cooperatives should be careful to balance the importance of parent involvement with the reality that many parents are working full time. Although many state and local governments have established incentives to encourage employers to allow parents time off for involvement in their children's activities, the reality is that some parents are simply unable to take time off. For this reason, some flexibility in participation should be offered.

Although overall time constraints for working parents need to be considered when evaluating and establishing parent participation requirements, they can also be balanced with the reality that the average American watches over 4 hours of television each day.<sup>19</sup> Even the busiest parents make choices about how they will spend their time.

When establishing participation requirements and options for flexibility, consider how they can be structured to encourage diversity of members. Single parents, parents with low-paying or low-status positions that have little flexibility, children who live with grandparents or legal guardians — each of these situations can include parents, or parent figures who are eager to be cooperative members and want to

19. Real Vision: TV-Turnoff Network, 2002.

contribute and be a part of a parent cooperative. Despite this, rigidity of when and where participation occurs may prevent them from joining the cooperative. Diversity can enrich the experiences of everyone involved in the cooperative — staff, parents, and children.

### **Sampling of Parent Participation Jobs**

**Participation that directly involves interaction with children:**

- **Play Structure Supervision:** supervise children's outdoor play; maintain children's safety; help children resolve conflicts.
- **Art Easel:** Set up and take down paint and easels; supervise activity.
- **Indoor and Outdoor Manipulative Areas:** Set up and take down materials; help children safely use tools to independently create projects.
- **Science Table:** Set up and take down project; supervise children during activity.
- **Snack/Lunch Supervision:** Supervise set up, clean-up, and mealtime.

### **Support Participation**

- **Board Positions** (see section on board of directors earlier in the chapter): president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and committee chairpersons with board status.
- **Newsletter Positions:** 1-2 people. Collect articles; edit and lay out monthly newsletter.
- **Scrip Sales:** can be up to 4 positions: coordinator, purchaser, bookkeeper, and sales.
- **Book Order Coordinator:** Coordinate children's book order sales twice each year.
- **Classroom Representative:** (large co-ops only) Member liaison between room parents, teacher, and board.
- **Participation Positions:** 1-2 people, plus room representatives in a large co-op. Coordinate sign-ups and keep track of parent participation.
- **Administrative Assistant:** 1-3 people. Answer telephone and assist director with recordkeeping and similar office-related work.

### **Committee Participation**

- **Building/Grounds Committee:** 1-3 people. Ensure safety of equipment; monitor school for needed maintenance, repairs, and beautification; coordinate biannual work parties to complete work that doesn't require a professional.
- **Public Relations/Marketing Committee:** 1-3 members. Promote cooperative to prospective members and the community (e.g.,

brochure, press releases, articles to the local parent magazine, information to resource and referral agency).

- **Membership Committee:** 3 or more members, including representatives from newsletter and participation positions. Monitors and evaluates membership policies. Evaluates compliance and submits recommended policy changes to the board. In a large co-op, this committee includes classroom representatives.
- **Events Committee:** 2-4 members. Coordinate co-op social events, such as potluck dinners, children's graduation, support for beginning-of-the-year orientation for new and continuing members, involvement in community-wide children's events.
- **Parent Education Committee:** 1-3 people and program director. Coordinate parent education classes and related activities.
- **Fundraising Committee:** Minimum 5 members: chair, scrip coordinator (if applicable), and the primary coordinator of each major fundraiser (each major fundraiser usually has a subcommittee). The chair is usually a board position.
- **Personnel Committee:** President, plus 1-3 members. Submit program director evaluation to board for approval. Assist program director with personnel issues, as appropriate.

### **Encouraging Parent Participation**

Participation problems are not uncommon in parent cooperatives. As with other volunteer organizations, there is no workable way to ensure absolute equality of participation. The co-op can address the issue by instituting minimum requirements and welcoming additional contributions. Vicki Knight, a teacher at Sierra Madre Community Nursery School in California, notes "(The parent co-op) is a community, not just for children, but for the parents. Parents are going to get out what they put in. If they are open to this experience, if they are willing to give a lot in terms of being involved, then they will grow tremendously."<sup>20</sup>

Minimum participation requirements should be clearly delineated and presented in a positive way. "Sell" participation by discussing how meaningful it is! For example, "Parent involvement enhances the parent/child experience and offers one of those rare opportunities to truly gain in proportion to the contribution made."

Probably the most important way to encourage participation is to weave the topic into almost every aspect of the program. Emphasize

20. Barry, 2001.

the cooperative/parent-participation aspect of the program in all written information about the program. Prepare and distribute a biweekly or monthly newsletter that consistently includes information about the importance of parent involvement. Parent participation is what makes the cooperative program unique.

The importance of participation should be discussed as a part of new-parent orientation. Some cooperatives assign a mentor for each new parent. The mentor is a parent who is on the board or has previous experience with the program. This strategy is particularly effective when a parent starts midyear, when an orientation isn't offered.

Many cooperatives give parents the option of reducing their participation by "buying out" of some of the participation requirements (see "troubleshooting," later in this chapter).

Many cooperatives offer interested families the option of increasing their participation for reduced tuition. Sometimes applying the money collected from participation "buy-outs" funds this option.

The importance of involvement can also be supported by consequences for lack of participation. For example, impose a fine for nonparticipation. The fine should be substantial enough that it is a deterrent. Have an explicit policy for removal of a child/family from a program that includes delinquent participation as a reason for expulsion.

#### **Recruitment for Parent Jobs**

A well-planned program with specific, meaningful job descriptions is a key recruitment tool. Once jobs have been developed, planning for recruitment can begin. A recruitment message should explain the co-op's mission statement and the integral, important role of parent participation.

Recruitment techniques can be divided into three approaches: direct, indirect, and delegated. A variety of approaches can be utilized, depending on available time, resources, and the number of parent volunteers. Some strategies include:

1. Do everything possible to make jobs appealing. If some jobs are pure drudgery, include in the description how much money this volunteer service saves the school each year.<sup>21</sup>

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21. Each job should be evaluated to determine whether it can be more easily and cost-effectively hired out.

2. Include lots of job choices with varying flexibility. Place clear, concise job descriptions into a binder that parents can leaf through to find jobs that appeal to them.
3. Display a monthly participation chart that clearly displays a list of jobs (including board positions), and parents responsible for them. This makes jobs transparent and reminds people that everyone is contributing.

It is helpful to examine the literature on motivating volunteers to better understand recruitment techniques.

### **Important Elements of Volunteerism**

To be effective, volunteers in any organization need to have a shared understanding of the mission of the organization, a clear understanding of the role of volunteers in the program, and see a clear benefit to volunteering. Volunteers need to understand methods of recording volunteer time, and be able to see that they are making a worthwhile contribution. One co-op uses a time clock and sign-in sheet for parent-members to record time.

Clearly written expectations regarding volunteer contributions include expectations of what to do if a scheduled volunteer cannot work (e.g., if a volunteer needs to miss an event, they need to find a substitute). This may be presented in the form of a contract that outlines expectations. The volunteer needs to feel welcome and appreciated.

### **The Job Description**

The job description should be an explicit statement of what is involved in the job. Taking the time up front to carefully design job descriptions will save time and problems later. A job description that is poorly or hastily written results in confusion and problems for all parents and preschool staff.

#### **Components of the Job Description:**

- **Position Title:** The title itself should be descriptive of the duties. A descriptive job title gives the volunteer a sense of identity.
- **Purpose of the Job:** Outline the justification for having such a position. This enables volunteers to increase their understanding of their roles and enables the paid staff to understand them as well. Avoid "judging" the job, i.e., calling it simple, mindless, or dull.
- **Responsibilities and Duties:** Clearly list and explain what the volunteer



## FEATURE 21

**SAMPLE VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Job Title:** President/Chair of TLC Preschool Co-op

Purpose: Presiding officer of the board of directors

Supervised by: board members

Accountable to: membership

**Approximate Time Commitment:** Position duration is 1 year – 6/30 through 6/29, and takes about 7–10 hrs. per month.

**Duties:** Comply with laws and bylaws. Plan and facilitate board meetings and coordinate board activities. Work closely with the program director of the child care program to ensure follow-through on board decisions and dissemination of information to membership. May delegate specific duties to program director, board members, or committee chairs but remain accountable for performance.

Additional responsibilities include:

- Ensure that procedures are in place for effective recruitment, training, and evaluation of board members;
- Facilitate the annual performance evaluation of the program director;
- Prepare a brief summary of board activities for the "message from the president," column in monthly co-op newsletters;
- Represent the cooperative at relevant community and cooperative association meetings.

**Qualifications:** Energetic co-op member who is capable of and feels comfortable with leadership position. Nomination must be (1) approved by co-op board or nominating committee, and/or (2) elected by majority vote of membership.

**Benefits:** Be a central part of the co-op. Help guide decisions about the program and work with others who have a high degree of interest in ensuring that co-op children and their families receive the best experience possible.

**Other Responsibilities/Comments:** Conduct monthly board meetings at the co-op on the second Tuesday of each month. Please contact program director Mary Lopez or outgoing president Loretta Burke for additional information.

is to do on the job. The list of responsibilities and duties should be as specific as possible — use action verbs. Include reporting requirements, and indicate the results expected.

- **Supervisory Plan:** Identify who the volunteer should report to, who is responsible for making sure that the job gets completed, and to whom the volunteer addresses questions or concerns.
- **Qualifications:** Present the specific personal and experiential requirements for the job. This information should be as clear as possible to enable potential volunteers to know whether they are qualified for a particular job.
- **Time Commitment:** Clearly state the commitment asked of the volunteer in terms of the number of hours involved, the minimum length of service, and any other special requirements.
- **Location:** Indicate where at the co-op the job is to be performed, or note whether it is something volunteers can do at home.
- **Benefits:** Be accurate and stress the positive aspects of the job. For example, it may allow the parent the ability to work closely with their child, to engage in new experiences, or gain improved parenting skills.
- **Comments:** Include other information that will further describe and clarify the job.

### **Marketing the Co-op**

To maintain membership, the cooperative needs to participate in ongoing marketing.

Cooperative preschool and child care programs are in the business of providing a service for their members: quality programs for children. To survive and thrive, the cooperative must maintain membership by attracting new members.

Most public relations specialists agree that kids (and pets!), tend to be magnets for publicity. Parent co-ops are able to attract free publicity. Nevertheless, the ability to gain favorable publicity often requires careful nurturing and attention. Effective public relations is not an afterthought — it is a crucial component of an effective business plan.

### **The Brochure**

Every cooperative should have a brochure. The brochure should be appealing and welcoming. It should be handed out to parents who are interested in the program, to potential employees, to the general public, and to the media. Because it is such an important document, sufficient care and attention need to go into its production and presentation.