



Stage 1 Development

## Forming Your Steering Committee

You've been having those conversations with a few friends or community members, reading up on what it takes to start a food co-op, and you're ready to move forward. What's the next step?

Forming an official steering committee to move the effort forward.

We've got a nice article online called [Tips for Forming Your First Steering Committee](#). In this piece we make the case for not just talking it to your friends and asking for volunteers, but approaching those you think would serve in their role well. We also offer points to consider when deciding who to approach.

### Steering Committee

What exactly is the steering committee and what is it responsible for?

The steering committee is responsible for moving the co-op through its earliest stages until the co-op is legally set up and the first board of directors is appointed. This first set of directors will be replaced by the democratically elected board of directors at your first annual owner meeting. Some things the steering committee will be responsible for include:

- research - gathering information on how food co-ops are developed and educating themselves on the process
- preliminary feasibility - surveying the community for level of interest, basic research on available real estate in your area, perhaps a preliminary market study
- community outreach - first public meeting/meetings to assess community interest, educate the community on what a food co-op is and how it can be a benefit
- legally file articles of incorporation, develop bylaws
- set up ownership share structure (what it will cost to buy a share, etc.), make decisions about how owner equity will be held, and launch of the sale of owner equity shares
- coordinate communications to the community - social media, printed materials, naming of the co-op, logo design, newsletters, speaking at public events, tabling, etc
- financial - tracking all money coming in and being spent, approve expenditures, and researching/pursuing sources of funding/grants

Steering committee members put in significant work. Anyone serving on the steering committee has to have ample time available to attend meetings, events, and do committee work. This is not an appropriate role for anyone who can't consistently put in a minimum of 5-10 hours a week.

### Subcommittees

Any of the important, necessary tasks above can be delegated to a subcommittee; some of this work *should* be delegated to subcommittees to move forward effectively. These subcommittees can and should include people

not on the formal steering committee. All subcommittees are empowered by the steering committee and report to the steering committee. Below are some ideas and common early sub-committees.

Some suggested subcommittees:

- **Financial** - responsible for setting up financial record keeping (most use quickbooks), a bank account, tracking income and expenditures; research potential sources of grants and apply, other forms of income for early organizing
- **Legal** - research your state's cooperative statutes, find co-op experienced lawyer to oversee filing process, research how to file articles of incorporation and bylaws, research important issues (like structuring owner shares, etc) are handled by mature co-ops in your region, oversee the filing
- **Outreach/Communications** - responsible for setting up e-mail addresses, social media, keeping up social media, creating first printed materials, newsletters, etc
- **Member-Owner Recruitment** – responsible for researching share price options and what similar co-ops are setting their price at as well as planning for the launch of selling ownership shares and how to promote that effort and make it effective

Again, having all of these subcommittees is not mandatory, but forming at least some of them is highly recommended. You're looking to broaden the circle of connections and talents as well as keeping the work load reasonable for steering committee members by dividing tasks in this way. Subcommittees should not be heavily populated by steering committee members. All steering committee members should make it a goal to serve on only one subcommittee, with two being an upper limit.

***Other resources that may be helpful at this stage:***

#### **[Tips for Forming Your First Steering Committee](http://www.foodcoopinitiative.coop/node/18920)**

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#### **What Do I Do First?**

[http://www.foodcoopinitiative.coop/sites/default/files/What%20Do%20I%20Do%20First\\_0.pdf](http://www.foodcoopinitiative.coop/sites/default/files/What%20Do%20I%20Do%20First_0.pdf)

**FCI Webinar: [Organizing Your Team](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3eLZXGEPvU)**, with Ben Sandel and Bill Gessner of CDS Consulting CO-op

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3eLZXGEPvU>

**FCI Webinar: [Let's Start a Food Co-op! What do we do now?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDTeHCRs4lk&feature=youtu.be)**

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