



April 2026 Update

Colorado Co-op Council

April Issue

Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter	1
<i>From Alignment to Ownership.....</i>	2
<i>Listening First</i>	3
What We're Hearing So Far	3
Where We Are Headed	4
<i>Heads Up: Employee</i>	
<i>Related Claims.....</i>	5
<i>Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field.....</i>	6
<i>Closing</i>	7

Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter

This monthly update provides a clear view into what is happening across Colorado cooperatives, what is being heard directly from the field, and how those insights are shaping the Council's work. It is intended to create alignment around current realities and emerging priorities. As the listening phase continues, these updates will reflect real input, not assumptions.

Conversations are actively underway across the state, and the level of engagement has been strong. The perspective being shared is directly informing the Council's understanding of current challenges and opportunities.



From Alignment to Ownership

Ownership without accountability is **intention**.

Accountability without ownership is **compliance**.

Strategy fails without both.

In many cooperatives, strategy is not formally defined. Direction is discussed, priorities are implied, and decisions are made in real time. Yet progress still stalls, not because people lack commitment, but because ownership is unclear and accountability is inconsistent.

Even without a formal strategy, execution still comes down to both. Without them, good intentions remain just that, intentions.

Ownership is not about authority. It is about clarity. Who is responsible for moving something forward? Who is expected to make progress between meetings? Where does responsibility sit when something begins to stall?

Accountability reinforces that ownership. It shows up in follow-through, in reporting progress, and in addressing when commitments are not met. Without it, even strong alignment does not translate into results.

As cooperatives move through a season of operational intensity, the question is not simply what needs to be done. The question is who owns it, and how progress will be measured along the way.

Most have experienced the meeting where a priority is discussed, agreement is reached, and yet little progress is made before the next conversation.

When ownership is clear and accountability is consistent, progress becomes visible. Priorities move forward between meetings, decisions are followed through, and issues are addressed before they compound. When either is missing, work slows, responsibility diffuses, and organizations revisit the same conversations without resolution.

Focus on execution. Focus on cost discipline. Focus on delivering value in a market that leaves little room for error.



Listening First

The second-quarter focus will continue the mindset of meeting in person and listening. Initial cooperative meetings are underway across the state, with additional visits scheduled through the second quarter.

These conversations are focused on four priorities:

- Understanding current realities across cooperatives
- Identifying education and leadership priorities
- Surfacing operational and strategic concerns
- Clarifying where the Council can provide the most value

Before programs are designed or events are scheduled, the objective is to ensure that any future direction reflects what cooperatives are experiencing on the ground.

What We're Hearing So Far

As conversations continue across cooperatives in Colorado, clear themes are emerging. While each organization operates within its own context, these discussions are revealing consistent patterns in the challenges cooperatives are navigating.

- **Telling the Cooperative Story**
 - There is a growing need for a clearer and more consistent voice around the cooperative's impact in the community. This includes stronger local engagement, more visible communication, and proactive storytelling that reinforces the value of the cooperative model.
- **Manager Development**
 - Interest continues to build around structured development for managers. Technical expertise remains strong, but leading people, communicating expectations, and driving accountability are areas that are not always developed intentionally.



Issue: April 2026

- **Member Education**

- Many cooperatives are navigating a gap in members' understanding of both how the cooperative operates and why engagement matters. Strengthening member education will be critical to long-term governance effectiveness and participation.

- **Understanding Bylaws**

- Questions around bylaws continue to surface, particularly in how they guide decision-making and governance. Greater clarity and accessibility may reduce confusion and strengthen board effectiveness.

- **Clarifying the Cooperative Model**

- There remains confusion around how cooperatives differ from other organizational structures. From confusion about how/why Cooperatives are **NOT** nonprofits to confusion about bylaws, there is a clear misunderstanding among employees & members.

- **From Last Month**

- Director of Development and Regional Timing
- Management and Leadership Depth
- Peer Dialogue Among Leaders
- Market and Competitive Pressure
- Human Capital and Succession
- Employee Development

These insights will continue to evolve as additional meetings take place.

Where We Are Headed

The Council is following a deliberate process. Below is our current outline of 2026 deliverables:

January–June: Listening and On-Site Conversations

Continue cooperative meetings across the state to ensure broad input and representation.



July: Compilation and Analysis

Insights gathered will be compiled into a statewide summary identifying patterns, regional differences, and shared priorities.

August: Draft Recommendations

Based on findings, draft recommendations will be developed for review. These will reflect what was heard rather than predetermined solutions.

September: Cooperative Feedback

Cooperatives will have the opportunity to review and provide input on the proposed direction.

October: Board Presentation

Findings and recommended priorities will be formally presented to the Council board.

Website Launch

Work is underway to establish a functional Colorado Cooperative Council website, with a target launch date of May 31. The site will serve as a central point for communication, education offerings, and updates as priorities take shape.

Heads Up: Employee Related Claims

Employment-related claims such as wrongful termination and discrimination rarely begin at the point of termination. In most cases, they develop over time through inconsistent expectations, uneven application of policies, or lack of documentation when performance concerns first emerge.

What appears to be a single decision is often the result of a pattern. When expectations are not clearly communicated, accountability is applied inconsistently, or documentation is incomplete, organizations increase their exposure, even when intentions are sound.

In cooperative environments, where relationships are long-standing and decisions are often made with context in mind, these risks can be easier to



overlook. Consistency matters. Documentation matters. Follow-through matters.

Resources are available to help reduce this risk. HR advisors, legal counsel, and industry associations can support policy review, documentation practices, and supervisor training. Addressing issues early, with clarity and consistency, is often far less costly than responding after a claim has been filed.

When margins are tight, avoidable employment claims are not where resources should be spent. If you are navigating these issues, the Council can connect you with trusted partners who support policy review, documentation practices, and supervisor training.

Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field

Question: Where are others going for HR claims support or advisory services?

Insights: Many cooperatives are working with trusted advisors, including firms such as ProValue and other consulting partners, along with employment counsel and insurance-linked HR services. The most effective approach is not reactive; it is having consistent guidance in place before issues escalate.

Question: How are cooperatives accessing reliable market data for compensation and benefits?

Insights: Cooperatives are using a mix of industry surveys, regional benchmarking, and broader compensation tools. As a starting point, resources such as the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) can provide baseline data, which can then be supplemented with more industry-specific insights. Industry practice is to conduct a formal market analysis at least **every three years** to remain competitive and aligned with labor market realities. The key is not just gathering data but applying it consistently to inform decisions and communicate clearly with employees.



Issue: April 2026

Question: What alternatives exist for recruiting in rural and hard-to-fill roles?

Insights: There are both short-term and long-term approaches. In the long term, many cooperatives are building relationships with local schools, technical programs, and community networks to develop talent pipelines. In the near term, some are utilizing international labor programs such as H-2A to address workforce gaps, often paired with housing and other retention incentives. Increasingly, cooperatives are recognizing that recruiting and retention must be addressed together. Many are also incorporating hiring assessments to better evaluate fit up front, thereby reducing turnover and improving long-term workforce stability.

Have a question you would like insights on? Just ask, and I will dig in.

Closing

Thank you to those who have taken the time to meet, share perspectives, and engage in this process. I also appreciate those who have invited me to attend annual meetings, speak at local events, and collaborate on communication efforts. That level of engagement is critical to ensuring that the Council's work reflects the real needs of Colorado cooperatives.

This work will continue over the coming months, with a focus on translating what is being heard into practical, relevant support. The intent is to provide clarity, strengthen connections across cooperatives, and ensure the Council's efforts are grounded in real-world application.

If there are questions, priorities, or areas where additional insight would be helpful, I welcome the conversation.

Respectfully,

Sarah E. Bower Spivey

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