



July 2026 Update

Colorado Co-op Council

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Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter

As this July update came together, uncertainty continued to shape conditions across Colorado. Communities moved from dry weather to extreme heat, wildfires, torrential rain, and back to heat again. The effects have been uneven, but the pressure on producers, employees, leaders, and rural communities is real.

Principle 7, Concern for Community, matters most in seasons like this. In the cooperative space, community includes both the people and places a cooperative was created to serve and the broader cooperative community connected by shared purpose, relationships, and responsibility.

Concern for community is not an occasional act of generosity. It is a way of making decisions. This month's update continues our look at what is emerging from cooperative conversations across the state and how cooperatives can use the capacity they have to strengthen the communities they serve.



From Leadership to Community

Last month, we explored the connection between education, leadership, and stewardship. Leadership development is not simply about gaining knowledge. It is about developing the judgment to use responsibility well, and that responsibility extends beyond the boardroom.

This season has been defined by uncertainty. Colorado cooperatives and the communities they serve have moved from dry conditions to extreme heat, wildfires, torrential rain, and back to heat again. The impact has not been equal. Some organizations and communities have greater financial strength, leadership depth, staffing capacity, or operational flexibility. Others are using nearly everything they have simply to respond.

Uncertainty naturally causes organizations to pull inward. Leaders protect cash, staff time, attention, and capacity. Those instincts are understandable and sometimes necessary. Yet Principle 7 asks cooperatives to continue looking outward.

Principle 7: Concern for Community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Community in the cooperative space is twofold. It includes the community the cooperative was created to serve, whether geographic, agricultural, economic, or market based. It also includes the broader cooperative community of members, leaders, employees, and organizations connected by a shared model and purpose.

Concern for community is not an occasional act of generosity. It is a way of making decisions. It shows up in whose needs are considered, how far into the future leaders look, and whether decisions protect only the organization in front of them or also strengthen the people and systems around it.



Leadership brings access to information, relationships, influence, and resources that others may not have. That privilege carries responsibility. The measure of leadership is not simply what leaders preserve, but how wisely they use what has been entrusted to them.

Not every cooperative can contribute in the same way. Capacity may be financial, but it may also take the form of experience, expertise, relationships, tools, time, or hard-earned lessons. Principle 6, Cooperation Among Cooperatives, gives organizations a way to extend that capacity when one cooperative or community cannot meet every need alone.

If cooperation only happens when conditions are easy, it is not much of a principle.

The question is not whether every cooperative has the same capacity. The question is:

How are we using the capacity we do have to strengthen the communities we serve?.

Listening First

The third quarter continues the Council's focus on listening, identifying patterns, and translating those conversations into practical support. Recent cooperative visits and customer meetings have centered on governance, board effectiveness, strategic planning, CEO compensation, and the challenges that arise when roles, expectations, or accountability are unclear.

The objective remains the same: ensure future education, resources, and convenings reflect what cooperatives and their members are experiencing in practice, not what we assume they need.

What We're Hearing So Far

As conversations continue across Colorado cooperatives, several governance and leadership themes are becoming more prominent.



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- **Board Governance and Accountability**

Questions continue to surface around how boards address director behavior that disrupts meetings, undermines trust, or crosses governance boundaries. These situations become more difficult when expectations are unclear or when the board chair is reluctant to intervene.

- **The Role of the Board Chair**

The board chair plays a critical role in setting expectations, maintaining productive discussion, and addressing behavior that interferes with the board's work. Chairs need both the authority and the confidence to act when a director is out of line.

- **Board Training and Development**

Interest continues to grow around practical board education that moves beyond orientation. Directors need ongoing development in governance, fiduciary responsibility, strategic oversight, group dynamics, and the distinction between challenging management and directing management.

- **Board and Management Role Clarity**

Confusion between governance and operations remains a recurring concern. Clear roles help boards stay focused on direction, risk, and long-term stewardship while allowing management to lead the business.

- **Strategic Planning and Execution**

Strategic planning continues to be a priority, particularly how boards and management prepare separately, come together productively, set direction, and connect strategy to financial planning, implementation, KPIs, and follow-through.

- **CEO Compensation and Executive Benefits**

Questions about CEO compensation continue to surface in both cooperative and customer conversations. Boards are looking for reliable benchmarking, a clearer understanding of total compensation, and practical guidance on balancing market competitiveness, internal equity, financial stewardship, and the need to retain capable leadership.



- **From Previous Months**

Leadership development, succession, CEO support, member education, cooperative identity, compensation, recruiting, and employee development remain important themes.

These conversations suggest that governance effectiveness is not only about structure. It is also about behavior, courage, clarity, and the willingness to address issues before they begin to shape the culture of the board.

Where We Are Headed

The Council is continuing to move from listening toward analysis and action. The next several months will focus on identifying shared priorities, gathering feedback, and building practical education and resources for Colorado cooperatives.

August: Compilation, Analysis, and Conference Announcement

Insights gathered through cooperative visits, customer meetings, and ongoing conversations are still being compiled to identify common themes, regional differences, and shared priorities. The Council will also announce the December director training conference and begin sharing program details.

September: Cooperative Feedback and Registration

Cooperatives will be invited to review emerging priorities, provide feedback, and register for the December training conference.

Fourth Quarter: Recommendations, Board Direction, and Director Training

Findings and recommended priorities will be presented to the Council board for discussion and direction. The fourth quarter will also focus on finalizing resources, preparing for the December conference, and convening directors and cooperative leaders for practical education around governance, leadership, communication, and the cooperative story.

Website Development

Work continues on the Colorado Cooperative Council website. Once live, it will serve as a central point for Council updates, education opportunities, registration information, and cooperative resources.



Heads Up: Great Directors Still need Development

Strong boards are not built through experience alone. Directors may bring deep industry knowledge, strong relationships, and years of service, but effective governance still requires ongoing development.

Board training is not a response to failure. It is part of responsible governance. Directors need opportunities to strengthen their understanding of fiduciary responsibility, strategic oversight, board and management roles, group dynamics, and the expectations that come with serving as an elected representative.

This matters because governance challenges rarely begin as major problems. They often start with unclear expectations, behavior that goes unaddressed, or uncertainty about who should step in when a director crosses a line. When those issues are ignored, they become part of the board's culture.

The board chair has an important role in maintaining productive discussion, addressing disruptive behavior, and helping the board stay focused on its work. That responsibility is easier to carry when expectations are clear and directors share a common understanding of how the board should operate.

Great directors still need development. So do experienced directors, new directors, and future board chairs. Ongoing education helps boards govern with greater clarity, challenge management without directing it, and make disciplined decisions on behalf of the cooperative and its members.

Board development is not remedial.

It is stewardship.



Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field

Question: What are complaints trying to tell us?

Insights: Complaints are not always evidence that someone is difficult or unreasonable. They may reveal recurring operational friction, unclear expectations, communication gaps, inconsistent service, or problems that employees and members have learned to work around. The goal is not to treat every complaint as equally valid. It is to look for patterns, separate emotion from useful information, and ask whether the same issue is showing up in more than one place. Complaints can be uncomfortable, but they can also be early warning signs.

Question: How do you know what a leader actually needs to develop?

Insights: Development should not be based only on title, tenure, or a general leadership program. Assessments, feedback, performance patterns, role expectations, and business priorities can help identify where growth is most needed. The value is not in collecting another report. It is in translating the information into a focused development plan with clear behaviors, opportunities to practice, and follow-through.

Question: What does declining employee engagement look like before people start leaving?

Insights: Declining engagement often shows up before turnover. Signs may include less initiative, reduced participation, more frustration, silence in meetings, inconsistent follow-through, or employees doing only what is required. These behaviors do not always mean employees are disengaged, but they are worth exploring. Leaders should look beyond morale and ask whether expectations are clear, managers are communicating well, accountability is consistent, and employees understand how their work contributes to the cooperative.

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



Closing

Thank you to those who continue to share perspectives, ask thoughtful questions, and invite the Council into cooperative and customer conversations. Those discussions are helping clarify where pressure is building, where capacity exists, and where practical support may be most useful.

As the work moves further into analysis and planning, the focus remains grounded in what is being heard. The goal is to identify shared priorities, strengthen leadership and governance, support clearer communication, and build resources that help cooperatives serve their members and communities well.

The months ahead will bring opportunities to review emerging priorities, engage with the Council's direction, and participate in upcoming education and training. Continued input will be important as this work takes shape.

Respectfully,

Sarah E. Bower Spivey

Executive Director, Colorado Cooperative Council