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June 2026 Update

Colorado Co-op Council

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Colorado Cooperative Council Monthly Newsletter

As this June update is being written, wildfires are affecting communities across Colorado and the surrounding region. Cooperative members, employees, and rural communities are facing evacuation, disruption, and loss. Our thoughts are with everyone navigating this.

Cooperation Among Cooperatives is one of our founding principles for a reason: when one community is under pressure, others look for ways to help. If your cooperative has an unmet need, or if you know of one, reach out directly. The Council will connect you with the right people or resources. If you know of a fund, drive, or coordination point that already exists, please share it with me, and I will redistribute it to members of this council.

This month's update continues our regular look at what is emerging from cooperative conversations across the state.



From Education to Leadership

Last month, we explored Principle 5 and the importance of education, training, and information. The point was simple: people rarely take ownership of what they do not understand. Accountability is difficult when expectations, responsibilities, and purpose are unclear. The same idea applies to leadership.

Leadership capacity does not develop by accident. It grows when boards, CEOs, managers, and future leaders have real opportunities to learn, think, practice, and grow. Technical skill matters, but it does not automatically prepare someone to lead people, manage complexity, or make disciplined decisions under pressure. Many cooperatives have strong operators and committed directors, a real strength, but as retirements, succession needs, and rising expectations increase, commitment alone will not be enough.

Development does not require a large formal program. Sometimes it starts with better questions:

- How are we helping directors grow their understanding of governance?
- Who are we intentionally developing for what comes next?
- What do our managers and senior leaders need to keep growing?

Governance is not management. Management is not governance.

The board's job is to set direction, ask the hard questions, and protect the long view. The management team's job is to run the business. When a board starts managing, nobody is governing. Boards that stay in their lane give their CEO room to lead. Boards that don't will eventually have a CEO who stops trying to.

Leadership development is not a luxury. It is part of risk management, succession planning, and the protection of the cooperative's future.

There is an old adage that knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, and wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad. The goal is not simply to know the principles or attend a training session. The goal is to develop judgment.

The purpose of education is not simply knowledge.

It is stewardship.

The question is not simply whether we have leaders today.

The question is: are we building the leadership we will need for tomorrow?



Listening First

The second quarter focused on meeting in person and listening. Cooperative conversations continued across the state, with visits centered on understanding current realities, identifying education and leadership priorities, surfacing operational and strategic concerns, and clarifying where the Council can provide the most value.

Before programs are designed or events are scheduled, the objective remains the same: to ensure 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.

- **Leadership and Management Development**

Interest continues to build around structured development for managers and emerging leaders. Technical expertise remains strong, but leading people, communicating expectations, managing conflict, and driving accountability are areas that are not always developed intentionally.

- **CEO Development and Executive Support**

Several conversations have raised questions around how CEOs continue to grow in their own leadership. This includes peer groups, coaching, executive education, governance support, and tools that help leadership teams work more effectively together.

- **Board and Management Role Clarity**

Cooperatives continue to balance board direction with management execution. A clearer understanding of governance roles, strategic oversight, and operational authority can reduce confusion and strengthen decision-making.



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- **Strategic Planning and Execution**

Strategic planning remains a recurring topic, particularly the need to align broad priorities with financial planning, tactical implementation, KPIs, and regular follow-through. The planning day is only one part of the process. The real work happens before and after.

- **Succession and Leadership Depth**

Human capital and succession continue to be important concerns. Many cooperatives are considering how to prepare the next generation of leaders before the need becomes urgent.

- **From Previous Months**

Prior themes remain relevant: member education, sharing the cooperative story, compensation benchmarking, recruiting and selection, understanding bylaws, clarifying the cooperative model, peer dialogue among leaders, market pressure, and 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 the remainder of 2026 deliverables:

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 continues on the Colorado Cooperative Council website. Once live, it will serve as a central point for communication, education offerings, and updates as priorities take shape.

Heads Up: Strategic Planning Is More Than a Planning Day

Strategic planning is often treated as an event. A board and management team gather, discuss priorities, identify goals, and leave with a sense of direction. That work matters, but it is only one part of the process.

A strong strategic planning process has a full life cycle. It begins with understanding current reality, member needs, financial position, market pressures, operational capacity, and future opportunities. From there, leadership can identify strategic options, test assumptions, prioritize direction, and define what success looks like.

In a cooperative, this process requires special attention to the roles of the board and management team. The management team should have room to analyze, ideate, and develop strategic possibilities. The board should set direction, ask thoughtful questions, challenge assumptions, and ensure alignment with the cooperative's mission and member interests.

The board's role is not to manage the day-to-day business. The management team's role is not to bypass governance. Healthy strategy happens when both groups understand their lane and respect the value the other brings.

The planning day should not be the beginning and end of strategy. It should be part of a larger rhythm that connects direction to financial planning, tactical implementation, ownership, KPIs, and regular progress review.

Without that connection, strategy becomes a document.

With it, strategy becomes a management discipline.



Cooperative Exchange: Questions from the Field

Question: How should cooperatives think about developing their managers?

Insights: Manager development should focus on the practical skills managers need daily. These include setting expectations, providing feedback, communicating clearly, managing conflict, coaching employees, understanding basic financial drivers, and following through on commitments. Many managers are promoted for their strong technical performance, but leading people requires a different skill set. Development should be intentional, not accidental.

Question: What should a new CEO consider when developing themselves and their leadership team?

Insights: A new CEO should begin by understanding the current leadership team, clarifying expectations, and establishing a common leadership language. This may include executive coaching, peer groups, assessments, leadership team development, governance education, or formal executive education. The goal is not to chase programs for their own sake. The goal is to identify what the CEO and team need to lead the cooperative well.

Question: How should boards engage in strategic planning without getting into management's lane?

Insights: Boards should focus on direction, priorities, risk, member value, and long-term stewardship. Management should focus on analysis, recommendations, implementation, and operational execution. A healthy process enables management to present informed strategic options and allows the board to question, refine, and ultimately set direction. The board should challenge the thinking, not run the business.



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Question: What is one practical way to create more strategic thinking inside the leadership team?

Insights: One option is to create regular leadership discussion time that is not focused on status updates. This could be a monthly conversation focused on larger questions: What are we seeing that we are not talking about enough? Where are members' needs changing? What operational friction keeps showing up? What opportunities deserve more discussion? The goal is to create space for disciplined thinking before issues become urgent.

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

Closing

Thank you to those who continue to meet, share perspectives, ask good questions, and invite the Council into local conversations. Your willingness to engage openly is helping shape a clearer understanding of what Colorado cooperatives are navigating and where support may be most useful.

As the listening phase moves toward analysis, the focus remains practical: listen carefully, identify common themes, and translate what is being heard into relevant education, leadership support, and resources. The goal is not activity for its own sake. The goal is to strengthen the cooperative infrastructure that helps organizations lead well, communicate clearly, serve members, and prepare for the future.

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

Respectfully,

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