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# Thoughts About Member Manuals

## Introduction

When new members join your co-op, there's lots for them to learn. This is especially true for those who have no experience with housing or other co-operatives. In Canada, housing co-ops represent a minority form of tenure—much less understood by the general public than renting, strata living, or traditional ownership of single-family housing.

An up-to-date member manual is a helpful resource for new co-op members, as well as for existing members. Member manuals can bring together the most important co-op and neighbourhood information in an easily accessible form. They offer a handy place to answer frequently asked questions and can also be a great reference for those interested in exploring your co-op's governance or preparing for a general meeting.

Member manuals include critical co-op information such as:

- contact numbers;
- emergency practices; and,
- a co-op's rules and policies.

They can also include information like the co-op's history, annual events, details on external relationships, and community resources. Of course, things like the rules and policies need to be distributed so that all members of the community can understand how the community works and what the expectations are for members and their households. Co-ops that maintain their manuals regularly can be expected to have better informed members. They're a good way to be transparent.

## Template and Sample

CHF BC staff prepared a member manual template and sample manual to help housing co-ops create—or update—their own member manual. We also have some suggestions about best practices.

We imagine a co-op called *Generic Excellent Housing Co-operative*, and you'll see its (fake) branding on our template. That branding, and the co-op name, are some of the things you'd edit to make the template your own.

As you look through the template, you'll notice both **green** and **yellow** highlighting, usually accompanied with square brackets. We've highlighted instances of our imaginary co-op's name in **green**. **Yellow** indicates places where you'd make other kinds of choices or changes.



'Fill text' or 'dummy text', which holds space for your own content, is noted in an orange/peach colour, and is the typical *lorum ipsum* you see used for that purpose.

The template/sample can be used as-is in its entirety, or just for some suggestions and inspirations. We've tried to embed best practices that we've observed over the last decade.

Those best practices include:

- consolidating all active policies in one location
- separating policy from procedure
- dating and tracking the approval of policies and other co-op decisions
- explaining which responsibilities lie with the co-op and which lie with the member.

The sample doesn't include a full range of policies and job descriptions. We just included a couple of examples but recommend you consider our policy templates if you're revisiting your own, existing policies.

CHF BC appreciates the opportunity to learn from your work. If you have policies that you think function well for you and could be of interest to others, please share them with us.

## Distribution

Whether you already have or plan to create a member manual, one additional consideration is how to share it. Digital distribution is inexpensive, makes updates easy, and doesn't consume a lot of paper resources. It's an excellent starting point, and for some communities, it also a perfect ending point. That said, some members are more comfortable with paper, and it may make sense to offer the option of a physical co-op of the document as well.