**Article HED: A Framework for Measuring Impact
Article SUB: Data is Valuable Tool for Influencing Stakeholders, Funders and Policymakers**

In a time of increasing income inequity and job insecurity, cooperatives offer stable, local jobs and services. Measuring impact is a valuable tool for communicating the importance of cooperatives to members, communities, and policymakers. While personal anecdotes are illustrative and compelling, concrete data is essential to gaining support for policies and funding that enhances cooperative development and ownership. Establishing measurements for evaluating impact can also help a cooperative meet its strategic objectives.

**The ABCs of Cooperative Housing Impacts:**

The Cooperative Development Foundation, National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International and researchers from the Urban Institute developed a seven-point framework for cooperatives to measure their impact. The following illustrates how housing cooperatives can use this framework:

**Access** measures how a cooperative increases availability of its product to patrons, especially serving markets historically underserved or seen as “higher risk.” A housing cooperative can measure access by looking at how it contributes to the community’s housing options, affordability, housing stability, and eviction and/or foreclosure rates.

**Business Sustainability** ensures that the cooperative is financially stable and actively planning for the future. The successful and impactful housing cooperative operates at cost while maintaining adequate reserves and conducting timely maintenance.

**Community Commitment** measures how a cooperative gives back to its community. Community commitment can be shown by how a cooperative meets the needs of its residents, neighbors and other cooperatives. Cooperatives can measure their commitment to community by the number of affordable housing units provided, community use of facilities, use of local vendors, participation in local initiatives and how they respond to changing resident needs, such as an aging population or young families. A cooperative can measure impact by the number of new or struggling housing cooperatives with which they share their expertise.

**Democratic Governance and Empowerment** ensures members of the cooperative are being properly represented and that the business is upholding the model of democratic member control. A housing cooperative can measure democratic governance by tracking the regularity of meetings, frequency of member outreach and participation.

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion** encourages a cooperative to be aware of how they are representing the community that they serve. A housing cooperative can compare the demographics of its residents to the community where it is located. It can compare the racial, ethnic, gender and age make-up of the building to the make-up of the board.

 **Financial Security and Advancement** centers around providing the opportunity for wealth building of workers and member owners. For housing co-op employees, measurement could include a comparison of hourly wage and benefits paid by the cooperative to the community as a whole, as well as how the cooperative’s compensation and benefits compare to the local cost of living. To residents, this means comparing the cost of housing in the cooperative to that of the community, number of financial education opportunities offered to residents and measuring costs associated with moving within the building to accommodate changes in circumstances such as additional children or loss of a partner.

**Growth** is evidenced by increased community investment as well as local jobs and procurement resulting in stable jobs, high-road business standards and consistent services. Housing cooperatives can support growth by providing housing options for community members that allow a diversity of income levels to live in the community. Further, the leadership skills fostered by cooperative membership translate into community participation which, in turn, contributes to neighborhood stability. Stability of residents can be used as a way of measuring the cooperative’s impact on growth. Another way would be to survey members on their participation in community service groups, local government and advocacy of resident interests in the community.

**Applying the Framework:**

Given the diversity of the cooperative sectors, *The ABCs of Cooperative Impact* is a framework and not a universal set of metrics. Elements of the framework will be of greater or lesser impact depending on the sector. No matter the type of cooperative, starting the process of applying the *ABCs* is beneficial as an opportunity to engage in strategic planning and target setting.

**Start by brainstorming:** Engage members, leadership and stakeholders in thinking about what your cooperative wants to measure and why. Identify your audience—is it members, the community, philanthropy, or policymakers?

**Review existing material:** What work has already been done to assess this industry? Is there data already being collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, regulators, or local or state government that could be used to compare cooperative impact to noncooperative entities or to show trends over time?

**Prioritize:** Combine the brainstormed ideas with existing resources and begin to sort through what can and cannot be practically applied. Pay attention to what can be measured effectively. A small subset of high-quality data is much more valuable than lots of low-quality data.

**Build a strategy:** After a list of metrics is established, build out a strategy for collecting and reporting the data. This should include the data, how it is collected and how often.

**Pretest**: Make sure data collection processes are sound and that useful information is coming out of the studies. The process for applying the *ABCs* is iterative, not linear. Every scrapped idea and test builds toward optimizing the information gathered.

**Make good use of the data:** Once data has been gathered, use it. If your goal is to show the impact of cooperatives on local housing costs, share it with policymakers, housing advocates, cooperative organizations and the press. If your goal is to improve member participation, hone your member outreach with methods and strategies proven by data to achieve results.

**Share your experience with others**: Share your experience with other cooperatives and let CDF and NCBA CLUSA know how you used the *ABCs of Cooperative Impact*.

Keep an eye out for future publications from CDF and NCBA CLUSA on how *The ABCs of Cooperative Impact* can be operationalized. If you have questions or want more information about the *ABCs* framework, contact Leslie Mead at lmead@cdf.coop. The complete report, graphics and other information regarding *The ABCs of Cooperative Impact* are at <https://ncbaclusa.coop/resources/abcs-of-cooperative-impact/>