Including Members in the Ends Dialogue
A CBLD online workshop
Presented by Mark Goehring, markgoehring@cdsfood.coop
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Review terms

- "Including Members"… requires the board assumes the leadership position in the conversation.
- "Members"… how do we think about "members"?
- "Ends"… what is meant with this word?
- "Ends dialogue"… What is meant by this?
- "Dialogue"… Why use this word?

Review concepts

- Brief review of Cooperative Accountability and the Accountability Chain
- A brief lesson on the Policy Governance Model (Carver)
- A bit longer on Cognition, Transparency and Linkage (Fairbairn)
- Communicating with members as part of "regular board life"

CBLD

cooperative board leadership development

Outcomes

- Participants consider the importance of the ongoing "Ends dialogue"
- Participants consider members as a dynamic group
- Participants consider how time they are already spending can be allocated to this work (in regular board meetings, at annual meetings, time spent on writing newsletter articles and annual report material)
- Participants have resources to help their boards move this work forward

<u>Review terms</u>
"Including Members"… requires the board to assume the leadership position in the conversation. What is the board thinking about, learning about, working on? Why? How is this relevant to members? How does this work help build trust with members, that the cooperative is an agent working to produce value and benefit on their behalf? The board can lead and invite others into the work, including members. This is very different from thinking about "member linkage" as asking "what do the members want?" (see Malcolm Gladwell video What we can learn from spaghetti sauce.)

"Members"… how do we think about "members"? Challenge the way you think about members, especially if you have a clear, static picture of members. How are today's members and today's members' needs different from what they might have been 5, 10, 20 years ago? How might members and members' needs change in the future? What's different in the world, your community that would impact members and member needs? Introducing some dynamics into the way we consider members and members' might help us move into the inquiry process on what's important when thinking about producing value for members in the future. (see chart)

"Ends"… what is meant with this word? Think of "Ends" as the desired outcomes, the results, the purpose of the cooperative. This preamble might be helpful: As a result of all that we do, all the programs and activities of our cooperative, we will have….
As governors, the point of focusing on the outcomes is to skip over the variability of all the activities and programs and dwell on the benefit and value that is being produced. This is especially important when the relevance of the organization is challenged by changes in the world or marketplace. How DO we benefit members? What needs are emerging that the cooperative could satisfy? Are they relevant to members? Etc…
There are two other key questions embedded in the concept of "Ends," Who is meant to benefit from the desired outcomes? And, Is it worth the effort?

"Ends dialogue"… What is meant by this? As diagrammed in the Board Leadership chart, the board's work does not end when it has the policies it wants. What could we think about, learn about, that would better equip us to understand our desired outcomes and the changing world in which they are produced? Two practical ways to start this inquiry… One is to begin with existing Ends policy and consider what trends in the world are likely to relate; another is to say what's going on in the world that is having an impact on our members what learning might help the board and membership understand what might be possible. (see worksheet) How long might this dialogue last? Maybe forever!

"Dialogue"… Why use this word? The late David Bohm, "one of the greatest physicists and foremost thinkers of this century," (as described on the back of the book, On Dialogue) suggested that people have a hard time engaging in effective conversation. He was worried that humans might blow up the planet and started writing about "dialogue."

Definition of Cooperative Accountability:

COOPERATIVE
An organization or enterprise owned by and operated for members for the purpose of producing some common benefit / value

ACCOUNTABILITY
The quality or state of being accountable

ACCOUNTABLE
Giving a justifying analysis or explanation to prove a trust is fulfilled or an obligation is met

Demonstration of the Cooperative Accountability Chain:
Practice drawing arrows that show delegation and accountability.

Member/owners

Board

GM

Operations

Value produced for members/owners
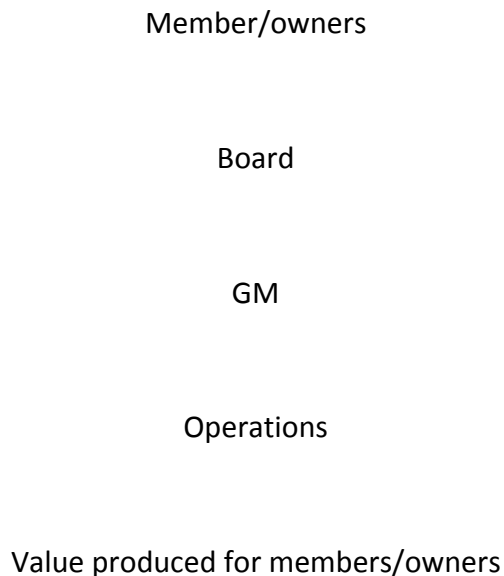
A very brief Policy Governance lesson…
Ends (THESE ARE THE POINT!)
Expectations regarding value produced on behalf of member/owners
Executive Limitations (these are necessary but not THE POINT!)
Conditions and activities that are unacceptable even if they work

This lesson is included as a public service from
How We Use Our Time, a board watchdog group representing members/owners everywhere

Excerpts from "Three Strategic Concepts for the Guidance of Cooperatives" by Brett Fairbairn

<u>Change and thinking about change</u> (Fairbairn)
"Change can happen to an organization, as an unconscious process, but this is not always desirable. Change should be undertaken by an organization as a thinking or cognitive process, involving imagination, discovery, systematic investigation, and pragmatic choice among well-understood options."

…

"Perhaps surprisingly, paying attention to how co-ops think leads to additional insights into successful co-operative business and service strategies."

…

"All organizations must confront the fact that the future is unknown and unknowable. Those that wish to be proactive have to base their ideas about the future on something: a mental model or an intellectual framework; a set of ideas about what is important, and which identifies where the challenges and opportunities lie."

<u>Transparency, Perception and Trust</u>
"This question of how members see their co-operative and its activity is the question of transparency." *(What are we thinking about?)*

…

"Another way of putting this is that the members trust the co-operative when they perceive it as an effective agent for themselves." *(Are we an "effective 'thinking' agent" for members?)*

…

"First, the co-operative must actually be an efficient agent for what its members want and need; if it is not, it will, in the long run, be unable to earn members' trust and support.

…

"But second, **the members must perceive that the co-op is an efficient agent: perception, in this case, is everything.** A co-op that is a faithful agent of its members, but is not known or perceived to be so, will gain no advantage from the relationship.

…

"It is the perception, created by communication and experience, that creates trust."

<u>Relationship with member/owners</u>
"A relationships-based view of co-operatives highlights the importance of issues of trust and of agency: how much and in what ways members trust the co-operative; to what extent it is efficient in acting as an agent of their interests. When we focus our attention on the trust/agency relationship, we can understand it as a source of ideas, of commitment, or weakness or strength of the co-operative."

The Board's relationship with member/owners begins with how the board sees its role and how it uses its time.

Regular Board Meetings
from no communication to 2-way; all-to-some relationship
While there might be very little member linkage taking place at a regular board meeting, the process begins here.
- Do we have expectations about the value of the co-op to member/owners?
- What are we thinking and learning about?

Articles from the board for newsletter and website
1-way communication; all-to-all
Report on the board's thinking process that is taking place on the member/owners behalf. Ask for input.
High frequency. Be regular, be predictable, connect to the past and the future!
- Having different directors write articles creates an opportunity to diversify the "voice" of the board. Writing about the board's work can also be a useful tool to help directors better understand the work.

Annual Report
1-way communication, all-to-all
- What path are we on?
- Where are we going?
- Do our accomplishments indicate that we're making progress in the desired direction?
- Medium to low frequency (especially low frequency if you connect this year's work to multi-year framework of the past and future).

Annual meeting
2-way communication, all to some, combine with follow up article in newsletter for all-to-all
- Reports with same purpose as noted in Annual report.
- Opportunity for engagement with members. Have fun!
- Gather information to fold in to the board's dialogue.
- Follow up with newsletter article to all members.
- Ask for input at the meeting and in the follow up article.

Other regular member meetings

2-way communication; all-to-some

- Some co-ops have a semi-annual meeting with members rather than just an Annual Meeting.
- Follow up with an article to all member/owners

Special member events

2-way, communication; all-to-some

- Events designed to include members in the board's work. Usually designed for engagement on a specific topic or question.
- Follow up with an article to all member/owners
-

Member/owner surveys

2-way communication; all-to-all; representative sampling

- What does the board want to know?
- Takes advantage of scientific sampling methods rather than invitations to participate.

"Remembering"

As Fairbairn addresses "Cognition" and cooperatives being learning organizations, it raises the questions…. How do we remember what we've learned? How do we share the ongoing, developing story?

Creating an open chronicle of the board's work via the newsletter and other mediums noted above may meet this need… please share your ideas, successes and failures!

(and please, don't try to use board meeting minutes as the container for the learning process!)

Suggested during the webinar: Learning Histories: A New Tool For Turning Organizational Experience Into Action, http://ccs.mit.edu/lh/21CWP002.html

(thanks, Franklin Community Co-op in Greenfield, MA!)

Resources

New listserve for directors – might be a great way to share progress on this work.
NEW CGIN listserve for directors!
From CGIN:
CGIN is excited to announce the Co-op Board Members listserve, a forum dedicated exclusively to current directors of food co-ops – leaders wrestling with the same governance issues as you. However, this is not your ordinary listserve. CGIN has contracted with the CBLD team to be the listserve's Co-op Governance Resource Specialist. In this position, Mark Goehring and the other CDS CBLD consultants will monitor the listserve, direct requests to available resources, and provide their expertise when needed. Cost is $100 per co-op, with $50 for the remaining portion of 2008.
More information can be found at www.cgin.coop/listserves/board

Related readings (articles posted in the CBLD file repository for this workshop)
Brett Fairbairn's article, *Three Strategic Concepts for the Guidance of Cooperatives*
http://www.usaskstudies.coop/pdf-files/StratConcepts.pdf

The Real Business of the Co-op by Peg Nolan   (The Cliff Note version of the Fairbairn article)
http://www.cooperativegrocer.coop/articles/index.php?id=550

Leading, following and the wisdom to know the difference by John Carver

The Art of Powerful Questions / Catalyzing insight, innovation, and Action by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs

On Dialogue by David Bohm (a book)

Suggested during the webinar: Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together by Bill (William) Isaacs
(thanks, Franklin Community Co-op in Greenfield, MA!)

Charts and worksheets
Worksheet: Strategic Trends, Topics and Values; Study and Engagement concepts
Board Leadership chart (double circle): Building wisdom and knowledge
Draft sketch: thinking about members and member needs as dynamic and over time, rather than static? (draft)
Time Scope: from board meetings to long term change

Videos available for free that you can play on your computer
Malcolm Gladwell: What we can learn from spaghetti sauce
http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/malcolm_gladwell_on_spaghetti_sauce.html

Mark Bittman: What's wrong with what we eat
http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/mark_bittman_on_what_s_wrong_with_what_we_eat.html

Board Leadership

Study

Engagement

Don't ponder Ends, Attack Them

Drive an Ownership Ends Dialogue Beyond the Boardroom

Build wisdom and knowledge

Identify Ends Topics, Trends and Values

Reflect on policies

Invigorate the Ends Debate

Be Obsessed with Effects for People

When leaders are learning and growing, everything about them communicates the same opportunity to other people. They're excited, they do things differently. One of the most profound – and unusual – experience people can have on the job is to see their leaders grow.
- from Boards that make a Difference

Ends & Executive Limitation Policies

Reflect on policies

Delegation & Accountability

GM interprets policies, provides operational definitions and measures

Monitoring for compliance with board policies

Dynamic! Lots of evaluation and adjustment taking place

Further delegation

Adjustments! It's a dynamic world!

Programs and Activities!! How very exciting!!

Worksheet: Strategic Trends, Topics and Values; Study and Engagement concepts

A. What do we want to learn about, what do we want to teach?

What trends, topics and values emerge as candidates for study, engagement and reflection on our quest to be a thriving, forward thinking cooperative?

1. Do they hold up as key strategic concepts for the co-op that are worthy of inquiry?
2. What "compelling questions" can you think of to help move the inquiry forward?

B. What specific study and engagement ideas can you imagine related to these topics trends and values?

Do you know of related resources? What are they? (books, videos, people, place to visit, etc)

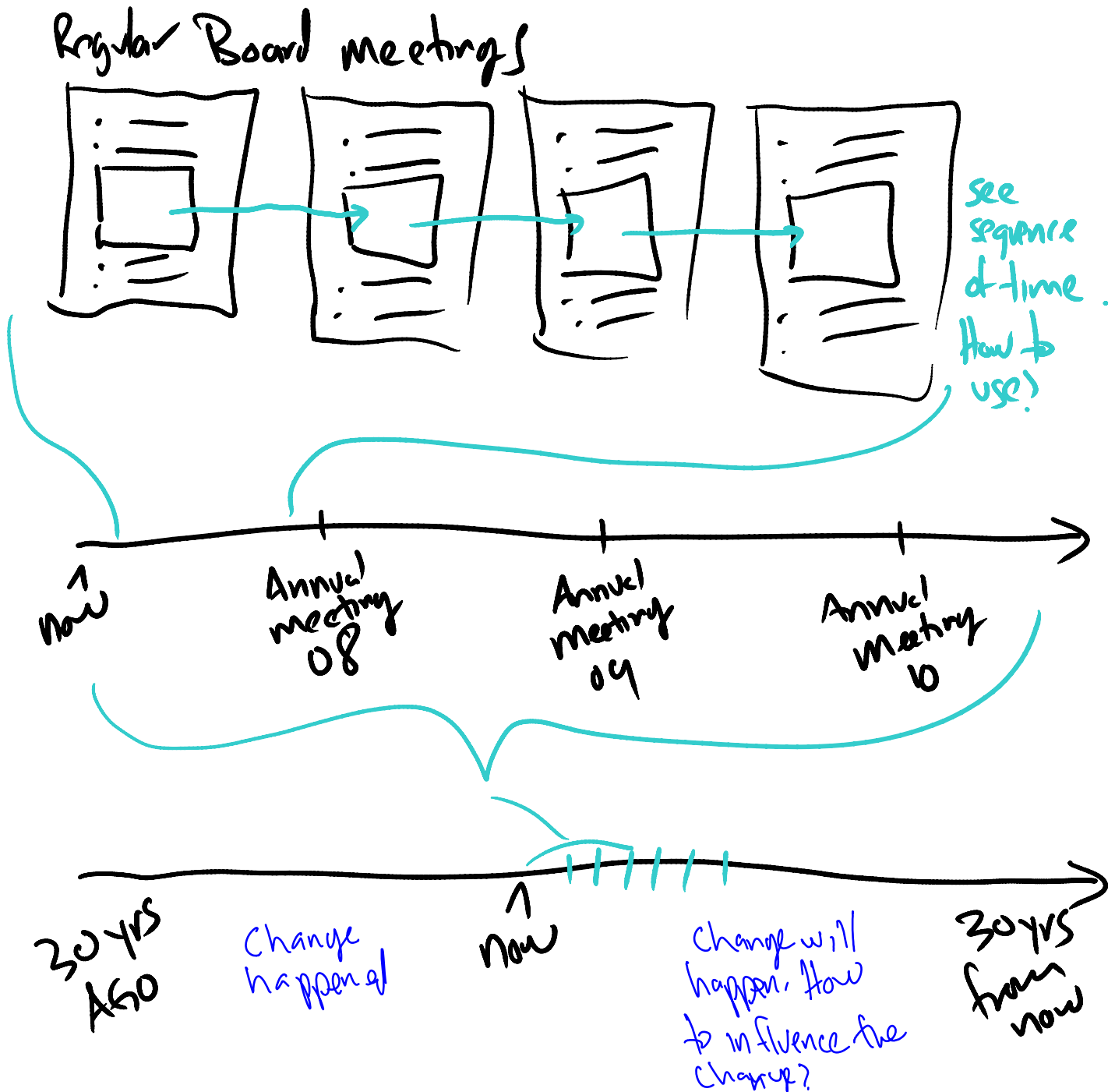## C. How might the board include members in this work? (engagement and transparency)

How might members be involved? How might the board share the story of the inquiry with members?
[suggestion: fully utilize existing means before implementing new ones]
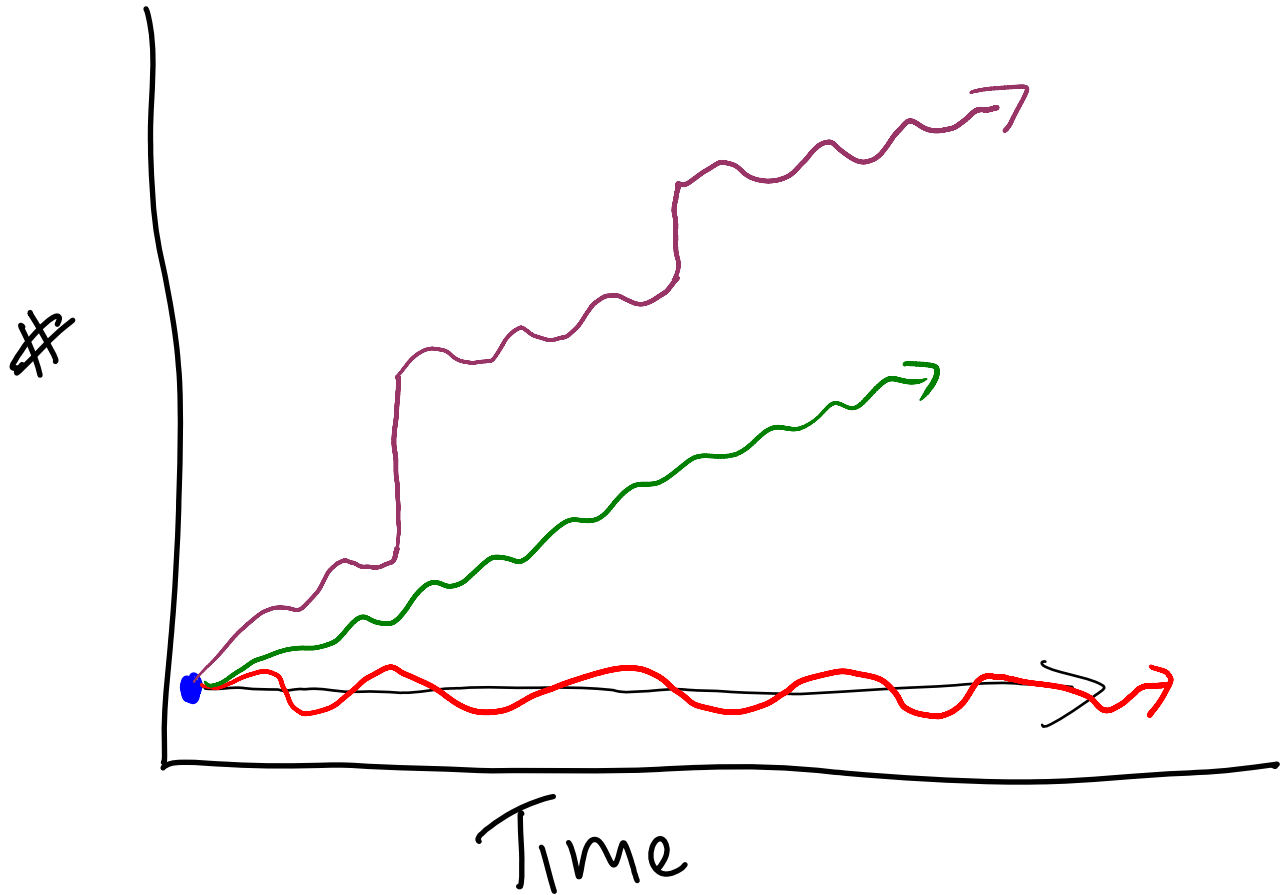
Trends, topics, values	Compelling questions	Study/resource ideas	Ideas for Member engagement/ transparency on this inquiry

Comments and feedback welcome on this worksheet. MarkGoehring@cdsfood.coop

Draft Time scope chart:
from regular board meetings to long term change

Regular Board meetings

see sequence of time. How to use?

now

Annual meeting 08

Annual meeting 09

Annual meeting 10

30 yrs AGO

Change happened

now

Change will happen. How to influence the change?

30 yrs from now

Draft sketch: thinking about members and member needs as dynamic and over time, rather than static.

~ = Dynamic

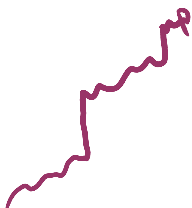Members as a static idea, without change

At a minimum think of members on a time continuum

Members in time, with change built in… might be external (what's happening in the world? Or internal (member needs change)

Same as above but more members over time. (some you don't even know!)

Same as above but growth in members is not incremental… leaps based on projects, new stores, etc. (some you don't even know!)

Feedback welcome: markgoehring@cdsfood.coop