

Foundational HR in Co-ops: Leverage Employee Experience Touchpoints

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Human Resource Management (HRM), when done right, is an interactive process between employees, managers, HR professionals and customers. HRM impacts all areas of the business – because people impact all areas of the business. People move the cooperative forward, so if one person isn't doing their part, the gaps can be felt across the co-op.

Co-op leaders make the biggest impact on employees by understanding and communicating effectively through key employee touchpoints. Each of those touchpoint interactions is based on a strong legal and best practice foundation.

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Foundational HR – The Basics

Great HR begins with compliance. While it's not most people's favorite part of their job, it's critical and required to effectively manage the employee touchpoints. Having an outside expert examine current forms, [policies, and procedures](#) provides valuable insights to ensure compliance with changing (and often complicated) local and federal employment laws. This examination can help cooperatives build a solid HR foundation.

These HR Basics are important and should not be overlooked:

- Paychecks pulling the appropriate deductions
- I-9 Forms are filled out correctly and employment law posters posted
- Job descriptions are up-to-date
- Employees and managers understand what to do when certain situations occur, such as harassment or discrimination

Foundations Consulting has a downloadable [HR Best Practices guide](#) to help you get started in this process.

Beyond paperwork, HR is also asked to monitor and track progress on a [variety of measurements](#) that are key to the business – such as turnover trends, employee engagement, recruiting and onboarding success, and revenue per employee. These are all foundational to successful HRM.



Co-op Employment Branding – The Message

The [employment brand](#) is the image your cooperative projects to current and potential employees. It's your reputation in the community as an employer. This branding starts from within and extends to your external marketing plan.

Defining Your Employment Brand

- What do people say in your community about your cooperative? Is it a good place to do business and work?
- What image are your employees projecting to the community?
- What does your website and social media say about the benefits of working for your cooperative?
- How do current employees feel about working for your cooperative? What's the culture like and [do people feel included](#) and valued?
- What messages do you want your employees to understand about working at your cooperative and how can you incorporate that into your internal communications strategy?
- What messages do you want the community to hear about working at your cooperative and how can you incorporate those into your marketing strategy?

In today's difficult recruiting climate, employment branding is more important than ever. Keep an eye on review websites like [Glassdoor](#) and [Indeed](#), where current and former employees can post their stories. Even if you are a smaller cooperative, all it takes is one negative review to significantly impact your applicant pool.

Recruiting for Co-op Careers

Recruiting has changed drastically over the past 10 years. Today's candidates expect an easy application process with quick turnarounds and personalized follow-up.



While [some positions are seasonal](#) in a cooperative, other positions are needed year-round. The recruiting strategy should be tailored to the specific need and target candidates. Gone are the days when we could post one ad in the local paper and receive several qualified candidates.

Today, cooperatives find a variety of ways to attract candidates with diverse experiences:

- Community and college career fairs
- Job postings (newspapers, online advertisements and postings, professional networking groups)
- Radio ads
- Social media ads and postings on company pages

- Word-of-mouth
- Internship programs
- Networking and sponsoring with community groups
- Sponsoring college scholarships

Recruiters have never been so engaged in marketing. In the tight employment market, they are actively looking to find the talent needed in unique ways.

Interviewing Co-op Candidates

Once the candidates are here, it is important to ensure each candidate goes through the same interview process. Proper training will give managers the tools and resources to find the talent they need in a way that doesn't cause potential legal liability for the cooperative.

Common Interviewing Training Elements

- Equal employment opportunity laws
- Behavioral interview [questions](#)
- Interviewing tips and pitfalls
- Understanding rater bias

Onboarding – Create a Lasting Impression

First impressions matter, and that continues beyond the initial interview. The time between when someone accepts a position and when they start the job and get to know their new coworkers is one of the most important times in the employment relationship.

Cooperatives that go beyond simply providing an offer letter, explaining benefits and completing required government and payroll forms will find their investment in time and resources pays off. As a result of a proactive and informative onboarding process, new hires have reduced times to productivity and increased engagement and loyalty to the cooperative. [SaplingHR](#) provides data to support this notion.

Our [Best Practices Guide](#) provides insights on how to take your onboarding process to the next level. It doesn't need to be a cumbersome project. We know you are busy. Many hands make light work – so gather leaders, HR, and the new employee's team to create an integrated onboarding process that makes the employee feel valued, helps them understand what their job is, and buy into the mission and vision of your cooperative.

Cooperatives are built on the notion that value is created when we come together. Begin instilling that commitment from the moment someone accepts a position.

Training & Developing Co-op Employees

Training matters. While many cooperatives and organizations fall into the trap of reactively providing training to employees and managers, the best managers are proactive. They talk with employees to identify their [strengths](#), skill gaps, discuss their long-term career aspirations, and identify a way to help the employee get there. Yes, this is more than training – it’s strategic career planning.

Strategic career planning encompasses the needs of the cooperative and employee by focusing on:

- Short and long-term business needs
- Review of existing skill sets
- Identification of skill gaps
- Plans to close the skill gaps
- Conversations between managers and employees on interests and motivation

Once training needs are identified, it’s time to look for training resources. Foundations Consulting offers training for Board members, managers, and employees focused on performance management, compensation, and compliance. If we aren’t able to provide the training you need, we can connect you with excellent consultants who also specialize in the cooperative business.

Manager’s Role in Engagement

Employee engagement, according to [Gallup](#), is “the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace.” Basically, it’s about having employees who love what they do and are excited to voluntarily go above and beyond to help the business.

Gallup has found that an employee’s manager or team leader accounts for 70% of the variance in team engagement levels. That’s a big impact!

Engagement surveys offer leadership point-in-time results on employee perceptions, expectations and experiences. Vendors vary in cost and complexity – but all will offer key insights into the pulse of the organization. Foundations Consulting doesn’t offer engagement survey services, but we know vendors who do.



Foundations Consulting helps organizations take results from engagement surveys and develop meaningful action plans to meet current and future strategic initiatives. Sometimes those action plans are employee- or team-driven; other times they include manager-specific changes that positively impact employees, and in turn, your business results and co-op members.

While many people dread performance reviews, it doesn't have to be that way. Performance reviews tend to get a bad rap when they aren't relevant or when managers don't know how to manage the conversation.

One of a manager's main purposes is to lead others towards high performance levels. This is done through a variety of ways, such as:

- Setting and communicating [expectations and goals](#)
- Facilitating effective team and one-on-one meetings
- Providing feedback
- Documenting both positive and negative performance



Sometimes, organizations also need to make difficult decisions and let people go if they aren't doing their job well. This critical employee touchpoint should be managed thoughtfully with clear communications.

Foundations Consulting meets each cooperative where they are at and develops performance management processes and training to help move the business forward. While some people might never look forward to formal performance conversations, there are ways to integrate performance management into regular routines so those annual reviews aren't so intimidating.

Foundations Consulting offers [performance management training](#) on a variety of topics.

Compensation Matters

Compensation is critical to your HR efforts. Cooperatives that thoughtfully consider their local and industry-specific employment market data - alongside their business objectives, profit projections and [compensation philosophy](#) - will find a compensation mix that attracts and retains the best employees.

This current employment market is no joke. Compensation conversations can be difficult with employees facing inflationary pressures with their daily expenses. Cooperatives are most successful when they have:

- A solid compensation philosophy created in alignment with the business plan and long-term strategy of the cooperative
- Accurate job descriptions that clearly explain job responsibilities and expectations
- Evaluated jobs for exemption status compared to federal and state FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) requirements
- Analyzed compensation across the cooperative (internal equity)
- Reviewed [external market data](#) on base and incentive compensation for jobs at all levels
- An incentive or bonus plan that rewards behaviors that drive business success
- Managers who can talk to their team members about compensation

Total Rewards Communications

Total rewards refers to the overall package of pay, benefits and perks an employee receives for working at a cooperative, such as:

- [Compensation](#) (base and incentive)
- Recognition (gift cards, thank you notes, appreciation received)
- Health, dental and vision benefits
- Retirement benefits
- Tax-free accounts for health-related items
- Car programs
- Work environment (workspace, culture, [inclusiveness](#), dress code, communications)
- Flexible work arrangements
- [Paid time off](#) (holidays, PTO or vacation/sick leave, parental leave)
- Training and development

There are many benefits of working for a cooperative beyond those listed above. Employers across the world continue to [get creative on benefits](#) they can provide to their employees.

Employees may not be aware of some of the benefits they have available to them. Total rewards communications help keep benefit investments top of mind for employees. This brings more value to the investment the cooperative makes in total rewards and improves employee perceptions of the benefits of working for the cooperative.

Communications may vary – sometimes you just need to explain a program and focus on the facts. Other times, you need to address the softer benefits. For example, when highlighting the benefits of the work environment, the communication may best be delivered in a shared story about the value of the culture to a specific employee, location or team.

Leaving the Cooperative

[Turnover can be expensive](#). When a high performing employee submits their resignation, it can be devastating to the manager, team and cooperative.

But not all turnover is bad. Unproductive employees who resign can be a positive thing for the cooperative. It can be helpful to measure total turnover, and “good” vs “bad” turnover.

Occasionally you have the situation where someone needs to be fired or laid off. While no one likes those situations, they will occur and are needed at times.

Whether an employee leaves the organization on their own terms, or the cooperative’s terms, their experience between the time the termination is communicated and the employee’s last day are critical. Why? Because the person who is leaving will share their story and impact your employment brand.

Is the exiting employee's story about your cooperative going to be a positive or negative one?

Managers and coworkers play a critical role in managing the cooperative's reputation in this situation. Communication and touch points are key here, and HR processes should address each component of an effective transition for the exiting employee.

The termination process can provide helpful insights. Exit interviews are a key element to understanding the employee experience based on their own perception of working at your cooperative. Exit interviews provide data for cooperative leaders to better understand what is working and not working in the cooperative. It gives leaders information to make changes to mitigate future unwanted turnover.

HR Touchpoints Matter

Each of these key HR touchpoints impact the cooperative's business directly. By focusing on core HR processes and policies, and examining what happens at each of these touchpoints, HR and management can lead employees through all stages of the employment lifecycle in a way that will motivate and engage employees ... bringing the most value to cooperative customers and owners.

About Foundations Consulting

Foundations Consulting offers compensation, performance management and compliance expertise to reduce risk and increase effectiveness for rural cooperatives.

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