

THE COOPERATOR

News and updates for leaders of resident-owned communities

Board communication problems?

Improve board correspondence by asking a few questions before you reach for the phone

Board Members use many modes of communication to discuss organization business: in-person meetings, email, texting, phone calls ... some Board Members even find themselves talking about ROC business at the grocery store check-out line.

Boards can go a long way to improve their communication by learning how to prioritize discussion topics and using modes of communication that are most appropriate for the topic or issue at hand. NCF has compiled a short list of questions

that Board Members should ask themselves before communicating.

Does this issue require a Board decision?

To help decide what the best mode of communication is, ask this question first: *Is a Board decision required?* The mode of communication a Board Member uses will largely depend on the answer to this question.

Topics of communication that *do not* require a Board decision might include: reminders about upcoming Board meetings, setting the Board

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Meeting agenda (which is done by the Board Chair and the TA Provider), or sharing general information about an issue in the ROC.

For communication that does not require a Board decision, more informal modes of communication are appropriate: face-to-face, text or phone calls, email, etcetera.

Issues that *do* require a Board decision include: passing resolutions, instituting new policies, renewing a contract with a vendor, hiring and firing employees, voting on evictions, etcetera. Almost all issues that impact the governance, management, or financial health of the ROC require a Board decision.

Remember: if a Board decision is required, Board Members have clear legal and regulatory requirements about how they communicate. Check

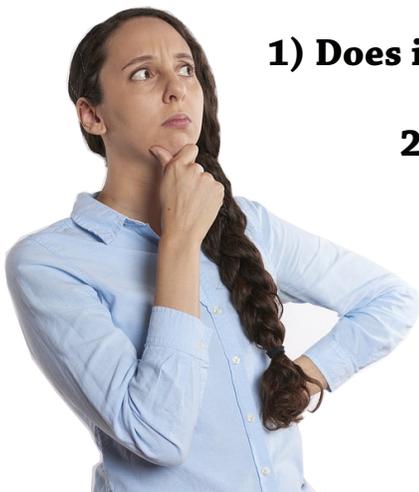
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Before you communicate, ask yourself:

1) Does it require a Board decision?

2) Is it urgent?

3) Will the Board need to deliberate about it?



Board communication from page 1

out NCF's best practice handouts at northcountryfoundation.org/rocs for more information on ROC Board meeting legal requirements in [Minnesota](#) and [Wisconsin](#).

Is this urgent?

For issues that require a Board decision, the first thing a Board Member should do before communicating is determine the urgency of the topic or issue at hand. Ask yourself: *Is it absolutely necessary for the Board to act on this immediately? Can this be discussed at the next regularly scheduled board meeting?*

If the matter is urgent or time sensitive and cannot wait until the next board meeting, the Board can schedule a Special Board Meeting or initiate a Board Action Without a Meeting (BAWM).

The following are instances that may require the Board to meet in between the regular Board meetings:

- Approval of a new Member to the ROC
- Large Infrastructure Project
- Working Session (event planning, committee formation).
- Board Training

Remember: Boards should not regularly need to meet more than once a month unless the ROC is undergoing a major capital improvement project or other special project.

Does the Board need to deliberate?

The next question a Board Member should ask before they communicate is: *Does the Board need to deliberate about this?* Part of the duty of a Board Member is to engage in thoughtful, well-informed discussion before making decisions on behalf of the ROC. In fact, deliberation is one of the core principles in the Board Code of Conduct and Ethics. For these reasons, NCF strongly encourages most decisions be made during in-person meetings to allow for meaningful discussion. Remember: Boards cannot truly deliberate via text or email.

Take Time to Talk About Communication

Board service is incredibly valuable to resident-owned communities. NCF wants all Board Members to feel empowered to act, not burdened by daily text message and email exchanges every time something comes up.

The next time your Board meets, take a few minutes to discuss how you could improve communication with one another and increase efficiency as a governing team.

NCF has enclosed a Board Communication Flow Chart tool to help your Board begin this conversation.

Anatomy of a Board Action Without a Meeting

A Board Action Without a Meeting (BAWM) is essentially a written Board resolution that is voted on by signature outside of a regularly scheduled Board meeting. The steps to carrying out a BAWM are:

1. Board Secretary (or other Board Member) writes up the proposed resolution in the BAWM. (Preferably typed on a computer to ensure legibility).
2. Each Board Member is served with the BAWM and indicates their vote on the resolution by signing their name along with how they vote (yes/no or approve/not approve).
3. A copy of the written motion with all signatures must be kept with the Board minutes.
4. The BAWM is announced at the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting and recorded in the Minutes.

Sample Board Action Without a Meeting

(Date)

Be it resolved that on (date) the Board of Directors took the following action:

[insert action here]

All Board Members were notified with the language per the bylaws. A majority of the Board of Directors approved this motion, their signatures appear below:

[Attach any necessary supporting documents or attachments to the signed BAWM.]

[signatures go here]

Ask your Technical Assistance Provider for a Board Action Without a Meeting template if you don't already have one on file at your ROC.



ROC's Share Celebrations and Frustrations from 2017

NCF asked Board Members from each of the ROCs in the Midwest to reflect on their community's key successes and challenges from the last year. Below are summaries of their responses.

Bennett Park Cooperative (Moorhead, MN)

The biggest frustration of the year, was, and continues to be, getting volunteers to step up and help out with projects around the Co-op.

The biggest celebration of 2017 was organizing a clean-up week where the Board and Membership worked together to get the Co-op in order.

Hillcrest Community Cooperative (Clarks Grove, MN)

The biggest frustration of 2017 has been a lack of communication and participation from all board members.

The Co-op's major celebrations for the year include: finishing several water main and sanitary sewer repairs, replacing the storm drains and concrete, and installing new lights throughout the community.

Five Lakes Cooperative (Fairmont, MN)

The main frustrations of the year were difficulties in home sales and title transfers and the continued problem of drivers speeding throughout the community.

The biggest celebrations for the Co-op were contracting with a new bookkeeper and making changes to staff arrangements. Both changes have resulted in a more streamlined workflow.

Madelia Mobile Village Cooperative (Madelia, MN)

The Co-op's biggest celebration was the installation of new water and sewer lines for about one-quarter of the community and the creation of a community garden.

At the same time, one of the Co-op's biggest struggles was working with the vendor who replaced the water and sewer lines.

Park Plaza Cooperative (Fridley, MN)

The Co-op's biggest frustration of 2017 was succession planning. Several veteran Board Members termed-out and it has been difficult getting new people to step up for Board service.

The main celebration for the year was receiving a grant from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency to fund the Co-op's storm shelter project. Park Plaza will break ground on the project in the spring of 2018. The Co-op also participated in a Community Solar Garden project to get Members signed up for solar energy credits, which will help both the Co-op and Members save on their energy bills.

Prairie Lake Estates Homeowners Co-op (Kenosha, WI)

The biggest celebration of 2017 was the Co-op's election of a new Board of Directors. The new Board has shown a renewed commitment to governing the Co-op by the Bylaws, which has created renewed faith in the Co-op's governance. The Co-op also acquired a manufactured home to use as an onsite office and corrected a drainage issue that had been a problem for a long time.

The Board turnover was a major challenge this year. It has been a big task to get both the new Board Members (and the Membership in general) trained on the Bylaws, Park Rules, and other governance best-practices.

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Celebrations & Frustrations from page 3

Sunrise Villa Cooperative (Cannon Falls, MN)

The Co-op's biggest challenge was the loss of some veteran Board Members and the Co-op's long-time Board President. The veteran Board Members had a lot of knowledge that cannot be replaced overnight.

The Co-op's biggest celebrations were the many instances where they came together as a community. The Co-op took out the old playground and formed a committee to plan and build a new one. Many people stepped up to help out with the playground project. The Co-op hosted a National Night Out event, which created a strong sense of unity throughout the community.

The Co-op also pulled together to help a family in need when they were going through a hard time financially. "Because of a handful of kind, thoughtful, caring people, a family didn't lose their home and they got a second chance," Board President Clayton Wilson said. "[The community's help] gave them hope when they thought there was none. To me, that's a family. Those are my neighbors. Those are my friends. I am proud to say this is my community. Looking forward to 2018."

Stonegate Cooperative (Lindstrom, MN)

The Co-op's biggest frustration was not being able to tackle as many projects as the Board had planned for.

The Co-op's key celebrations included: completing an exploratory water and sewer infrastructure report, installing new water shut-offs and flush valves to minimize the loss of water service to homeowners during system maintenance, and the Membership's vote to raise lot rents, so the Co-op can hire a part-time onsite manager.

Pammel Creek Estates (La Crosse, WI)

The biggest celebration of 2017 was that the community celebrated its first year of resident-ownership!

The primary frustration of the year has been working with the local municipality to connect to the city water system.

Zumbro Ridge Estates, Inc. (Rochester, MN)

Zumbro Ridge Estates biggest success of the year was becoming resident-owned! Purchasing the park has also delivered the community's greatest frustration, which is the sheer amount of work needed to bring the property back up to the quality the residents want. The road ahead is a long one. The Board hopes more residents will step up to help out as the community improvement plan takes shape.

NCF Technical Assistance Team's Celebrations and Frustrations from 2017

The biggest challenge of 2017 for the NCF TA Team was implementing remote technical assistance strategies. In the future, NCF wants to be able to provide technical assistance through online collaboration platforms, like online video conferencing for meetings and provide access to organizational documents through online file-sharing platforms. The road to this "remote future" is a lot longer than anyone thought, but the team is well on its way. Stay tuned for updates!

The highlight of 2017 for the NCF TA Team was the ROC Summit conference on Saturday, November 11. NCF staff enjoyed getting to know Board Members and community leaders from all over the resident-owned Midwest.

It was great to see leaders from different ROC's meet each other (many of them for the first time) and share successes and challenges. NCF has hosted regional gatherings for ROCs in years past, but this year's ROC Summit was by far the best attended. Every Midwest ROC, except one, was represented at the gathering! Thanks to all those who attended the Summit.

The NCF TA team also celebrated the one-year anniversary of *The Cooperator*. The TA team hopes ROC leaders have enjoyed reading each edition of *The Cooperator* as much as the TA team has enjoyed producing them. NCF looks forward to providing another year of content that ROC leaders can use to build leadership skills and improve community management.

ROC Summit Recap

Thank you to all those who participated in ROC Summit 2017! Nineteen leaders from nine ROCs attended the conference. The day was jam-packed with presentations and trainings focused on the topic of strengthening communication skills to be more effective leaders.

All presentation materials and handouts can be found on the ROC Resources page of the NCF website. Visit northcountryfoundation.org/rocs and scroll to the bottom of the page to view materials.

For those that were unable to attend the conference this year, NCF has written a summary of one of the key presentations from the conference that focused specifically on improving Board communication.

Summary of "Communications, Etiquette, and Teamwork, OH MY!"

Presentation by Gary Faucher, Regional Training Manager, ROC USA Network

In the afternoon, ROC Summit attendees participated in a training led by Gary Faucher that focused on how Board Members can be better communicators. Gary's four central points to strengthen your communication skills were:

1) Think like a team. What is the key to any good sports team's success? Working together and thinking like a single unit. Gary explained that the same idea is true of a successful Board of Directors.

2) Be aware of your natural tendencies. Gary talked about our natural, human tendencies to push back or dig in when we are challenged by something. Pushing back and digging in can knock us off our feet. Instead of pushing back or digging in, we can absorb the challenge or flow with it to avoid getting knocked down or knocking someone else down.

3) Be respectful. A little respect can go a long way. Remember the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated.



ROC Summit attendees gather for a photo at the end of the day.



Three Board Members from Pammel Creek Estates, Inc. listen and take notes during a ROC Summit presentation.

4) Watch the writing. Gary reminded Board Members that you don't have to be an award-winning novelist to write a thoughtful, understandable message.

Avoid run-on sentences and confusing slang or shorthand (like TTYL and F2F), use bullet points and lists to make messages easier to read, and whatever you do, remember: **WHEN YOU WRITE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU ARE YELLING.**



Gary Faucher of ROC USA Network

Capitol Corner

While the 2018 Minnesota legislative session is scheduled to be a short one, NCF has a full agenda of proposed legislation that will benefit residents of manufactured home communities.

Opportunity to Purchase Legislation

NCF is aware that other public-interest groups plan to introduce legislation giving residents a right to negotiate for the purchase of their parks whenever the owner chooses to sell. Such Opportunity to Purchase (OTP) laws have driven resident ownership of manufactured home communities to levels as high as 25 percent of all parks in other states, like New Hampshire. NCF has agreed not to take a position on the OTP bill in order to maintain relationships with the investor owners NCF relies on to make resident purchases possible.

Manufactured Housing Infrastructure Funding

NCF was successful in the 2017 push to pass a bill creating an infrastructure fund to provide low-cost financing to resident-owned manufactured housing communities for the repair or replacement of aging sewer, water, and road systems. Though the fund was created, the legislature did not allocate any money to it. NCF is asking the 2018 legislature to put \$2 million into the fund.

In addition, NCF is seeking a change in the existing law to permit resident-owned communities to obtain favorable financing under the Minnesota Housing Infrastructure Bond (HIB) program.

Property Tax Refund (Renter's Credit) for Co-ops

Current Minnesota law allows all residents of manufactured home communities except those in resident-owned communities to apply for a refund of some of the property taxes paid by the residents. NCF is backing a bill in the 2018 legislature to change the law to make the refund available to those living in manufactured housing cooperatives.

Recently, Homes for All, a statewide coalition backed by 150 organizations, voted to adopt the property tax refund law and the HIB's changes proposed by NCF and to encourage its members to support the OTP and Infrastructure Fund efforts.

Meet the Organizations Advocating for Manufactured Housing Reform

Homes for All is a statewide coalition that advances shared policy initiatives that lead to housing stability for all Minnesotans. The Homes for All coalition has endorsed several manufactured housing reform agenda items for the 2018 legislative session.



All Parks Alliance for Change

(APAC) is the statewide organization for Minnesota's 180,000 manufactured home park residents. APAC provides a vehicle for manufactured homeowners to express their needs and concerns in their parks and in the larger community.



Aeon is committed to helping people create a stable home where they feel safe and connected to the community around them.



Manufactured housing parks are an important part of that community. Affordability is especially critical for households with very low incomes who are not candidates for traditional home ownership and have few rental options. Aeon's mission is to meet this critical need while strengthening lives.

The Manufactured and Modular Home Association of Minnesota

was formed in 1951 and represents more than 350 businesses and industries in the systems-built home industry, including manufactured home park owners. MMHA advocates on behalf of privately-owned park owners and does not advocate on behalf of any resident-owned communities.



Cooperative Network is committed to protecting and promoting Minnesota's



and Wisconsin's co-op businesses. It provides legislative and regulatory advocacy, opportunities for education, and creative leadership in public awareness. Cooperative Network is the largest statewide co-op trade association in the U.S., representing a diverse group of approximately 400 members.

ROC's sign up for Cooperative Solar

Residents lower their carbon footprint *and* their energy bill

Over 65 residents from three Minnesota resident-owned communities have signed up for solar energy from the Minneapolis-based energy cooperative, Cooperative Energy Futures (CEF). To date, 12 residents of Hillcrest Cooperative in Clarks Grove, 38 residents of Park Plaza Cooperative in Fridley, and 16 residents of Sunrise Villa Cooperative in Cannon Falls have become members of the solar energy cooperative.

Through their membership in cooperative solar, the residents will convert over 430 kilowatts of fossil fuel energy into sustainably-produced energy and save an average of 20 percent on their energy bills, over 25 years. This kind of “double-win” is exactly what the cooperative development model is all about.



Over the last several months, NCF has been working in the three ROC's to get residents subscribed for cooperative solar. From letters and door-knocking, to gatherings around the kitchen table and community conversations, NCF has focused on an engagement model that puts residents at the center of development.

NCF is excited to report the growing success with the cooperative solar effort and would like to thank the residents and Board of Directors of Hillcrest, Park Plaza, and Sunrise Villa for their willingness to engage in the effort and come together around a cleaner, healthier Minnesota.

If you are living in one of these three ROC's and have not yet signed up for solar or know someone in your community who is interested, there is still time to sign up.

Remember, you do not have to live in a ROC to subscribe for solar. Residents of Freeborn, Rice, Sherburne, and adjacent counties may be eligible to subscribe.

Reach out to Courtney Overby for more information. Phone: 507-291-9037. Email: courtney@northcountryfoundation.org. Learn more about CEF by visiting: cooperativeenergyfutures.com/communitysolar

By subscribing for solar, ROC residents will collectively eliminate an annual 438 tons (876,000 pounds) of Carbon Dioxide emissions. That is roughly the equivalent of:



replacing 146,488 incandescent light bulbs with LEDs

OR



taking 93 passenger vehicles off the road for one year

OR



diverting 308,000 pounds of waste from entering a landfill

OR



preserving 438 mature trees

Did you miss the last issue of *The Cooperator*? Check out the archive on the NCF website for all past issues. Visit northcountryfoundation.org/the-cooperator.

Holiday Feature Photo:

Pammel Creek Estates Board Chair transforms home into holiday wonderland



JANE THOMPSON

Jane Thompson, Board Chair of Pammel Creek Estates, Inc. in La Crosse, Wisc., has been decorating her home for the holidays for over 30 years. She changes out the decorations every year to keep the display fresh. The setup of the display takes about a full day's work. Jane decorates her home to get into the spirit of season, uplift her neighbors, and inspire others to get into the holiday mood.

News & Reminders

Renewing Cooperative / Corporate Status in Minnesota

All Minnesota businesses (which includes Cooperatives) must file an annual renewal with the Secretary of State's office to remain active. Your entity will be "statutorily dissolved" (no longer be recognized as existing in Minnesota) if you fail to file your annual renewal. You will also be fined if you renew late. Renew and check the status of your business filing online: <https://mblsportal.sos.state.mn.us/Business/Search>

Renewing Cooperative / Corporate Status in Wisconsin

All Wisconsin corporations and cooperative associations must file an annual renewal with the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI). Annual reports are due upon the anniversary of incorporation. DFI sends forms to each cooperative 60 days prior to the date they are required to file. Late annual report filing will result in fees. Check the status of your corporation's records online: <https://www.wdfi.org/apps/corpar/>.

Zumbro Ridge Estates in the News

[Housing crisis threatens Rochester's ambitious growth plans](#), Matt McKinney, *Star Tribune*, 11/20/2017

[Zumbro Ridge Estates residents take ownership of their community](#), Francisco Almenara-Dumur, *KTTC TV Rochester*, 10/12/2017

Board Communication Flow Chart

YES ←

Does this require a Board Decision?

→ **NO**

Can it wait until the next Board Meeting?

YES



Put it on the agenda

NO



Does the decision require Board deliberation?

YES



Schedule a Special Board Meeting



Special Board Meetings must adhere to the same rules as regular Board Meetings:

- Advance notice must be given to Members
- An agenda must be written and distributed
- Minutes must be taken

NO



Initiate a Board Action Without a Meeting



A Board Action Without a Meeting (BAWM) is a written board resolution (preferably typed). In order to be legal, a BAWM must be:

- Signed by all Board Members (indicating whether they are a "yes" or "no" vote)
- Announced at the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting and recorded in the minutes
- Kept on file for future reference

If a Board Decision is not required, but communication is still needed, ask yourself two questions:

1. Is this matter urgent or require an immediate response?



Text or Call

YES



NO



Email



Examples of urgent communication appropriate for text or phone call:

"There's a water leak in the park, I've called the plumber already."

"I'm running late, I'll be there in 5 minutes."

Examples of communication appropriate for email:

- Meeting logistics
- Ideas for the next Board Meeting
- Reminders to the group
- Sharing general information
- Asking general questions

2. Are tone and context important? Does it require in-person communication?



Face-to-Face Conversation

YES



NO



Email



Examples of communications that are appropriate for face-to-face conversation:

- Two Board Members get together for coffee to talk about a problem they are having communicating with each other.
- The Board schedules a Working Session to set up for the Annual Meeting or to brainstorm about an upcoming project.