

Moscow Food Co-op

Working draft: Strategic Plan and Ten Year Goals

Moscow Food Co-op's Mission

Moscow Food Co-op, building a strong, dynamic, consumer owned natural food cooperative through the use of ethical and sustainable business practices.

What is a strategic plan?

A strategic plan is a roadmap for an organization's future, which defines its direction and aspirations, and helps to determine how resources (including money and people) will be allocated in the future. Simply put, strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next year or more, how it's going to get there, and how it'll know if it got there or not.

The Moscow Food Co-op has been growing and changing rapidly as a result of moving to its new, large, downtown location several years ago. Once the staff and board mastered the basics of managing the newly enlarged grocery, they felt that it was important to plan ahead for how the Co-op might change and grow in the years to come. Co-op members and staff felt strongly that whatever goals the Co-op set for itself, certain things should not change. As a result, the strategic plan supplements and builds on the bedrock of the Co-op's mission and values.

How was this plan developed?

The five broad goals of the plan were developed with input from Co-op members, board members, and staff. Here's some of what has happened over the last year:

- Co-op board, staff, managers, and members shared their perspective on where the Co-op should go (through community meetings, round table discussions, and via the "vision box") over a period of three months.
- The Strategic Planning Working Group reviewed and processed the copious ideas generated and shaped the basic themes that emerged into broad goals.
- The Co-op's board of directors reviewed the draft and gave us feedback on the goals.
- Members of the working group took that feedback and used it to revise and provide more detail about the goals.
- A small group of members (about 30) attended a "Dinner with Directors" to preview and provide input to the draft goals. Board members also provided additional feedback.
- The document was revised again to reflect the new feedback.
- Finally, we have created a final draft for review and comment by members!

Co-op Goals: Over the next ten years, the Co-op has set the following goals for itself.

Goal #1: STRENGTHEN CO-OP COMMUNITY: The Co-op will strengthen the Co-op community and spread an understanding of the Co-op's values and offerings – a "Co-op consciousness" – by better meeting the needs of current members and by increasing the total number of members and actively engaged members.

Goal #2: MAKE THE CO-OP THE BEST PLACE TO WORK IN MOSCOW: Co-op staff are essential to the health of the Co-op, and the Co-op will continue to invest in its employees. Within ten years, the Co-op aspires to be the best place to work in Moscow. In the next five years, the Co-op plans to be able to offer exemplary wages (living wage +) and benefits for full-time staff, compelling staff incentives and rewards, and a professional, responsive human resources department.

Goal #3: BUILD THE LOCAL, ORGANIC, SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND GOODS ECONOMY: The Co-op has a stake in building and sustaining our region's ability to produce and consume local, organic, and sustainable food and goods. This goal is central to our mission and belief in the "triple bottom line," which means that our decisions must improve conditions for people, place, and profit. Right now, local food and goods make up only about 10% of our total sales. To increase this percentage, the Co-op needs to collaborate with local growers and producers to provide more goods that our customers will buy.

Goal #4: INCORPORATE VALUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY INTO FACILITY: The Co-op is more than a grocery store. It is also a community hub – a place where people go to meet and see friends, hear music, and learn new things. Because we want to be sure that the Co-op practices what it preaches, it is critical that the internal and external physical spaces reflect our deeply held values. Our ultimate goal is to become a zero-waste facility. In the short-term, we hope to become a model of energy self-sufficiency.

Goal #5: INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, OUTREACH, AND EDUCATION: As a community hub, or *third* place, the Co-op performs many functions of a community nonprofit organization. It provides a gathering place. It sponsors educational experiences for children (Co-op kids) and adults (cooking classes) and partners with other local nonprofits (such as PCEI). It also provides community services, such as the Tuesday growers' market. The Co-op is committed to continuing to give back to the community and increasing the extent to which it can give back as it becomes more financially successful and sustainable.

What's next and how can you get involved?

We will be seeking input into this plan from the Co-op's membership through September 2008. Full copies of the plan can be found online on the Co-op's website: www.moscowfood.coop or at the Co-op's checkout.

You can tell us what you think by:

- Contributing a comment to the *Strategic Plan Comment Box* located in the front of the Co-op
- Joining board and working group members for a round table conversation (dates TBD)
- Emailing the strategy working group directly: strategy@moscowfood.coop

After we have modified the plan according to your feedback, the board will have a final chance to suggest changes and modifications. Once the board officially adopts the strategic plan, it will become a *living document* and we will begin the first year's activities.

As you'll see from the plan, the first year is mainly about exploring opportunities, gaining more knowledge, and developing detailed work plans. There will be many opportunities for member involvement, so if one of the goals calls out to you, let us know by emailing the General Manager at kenna@moscowfood.coop.

Goal #1: STRENGTHEN CO-OP COMMUNITY

The Co-op will strengthen the Co-op community and spread an understanding of the Co-op's values and offerings – a “Co-op consciousness” – by better meeting the needs of current members and by increasing the total number of members and actively engaged members.

Specifics: Because the Co-op's members are diverse, this goal has several specific strategies associated with it.

- a) Increase opportunities for all members to be involved and heard: The Co-op currently has 4500 members, of which a relatively small proportion are actively involved in the Co-op's work. This segment already feels a strong sense of Co-op ownership, and they want to actively make a difference in their community. The Co-op greatly values these engaged members and needs to ensure that their voices are heard. The Co-op needs to clarify, develop, and better communicate avenues for them to participate, volunteer and offer constructive input.
- b) Develop and implement a long-term vision for the volunteer program that offers meaningful opportunities for member involvement and solidifies this valued and valuable part of the Co-op.
- c) Increase benefits of membership and encourage engagement for “shopper-members”: Some of the Co-op's members don't want to be actively involved – they simply want to shop at the Co-op. For this group we need to enhance the tangible benefits of membership and ensure that they understand the avenues for further involvement, if they desire it.
- d) Increase membership by 100% by 2017: Members are the life-blood of the Co-op. Members support the Co-op both by spending more money than nonmembers and through their active involvement in the Co-op's mission. The primary target for membership are existing shoppers who are not yet members of the Co-op. Beyond that, the 30,000 students in the Moscow/Pullman area are a potential target for membership, as are the many individuals in our community who are simply not aware of what the Co-op has to offer. As the membership grows, the Co-op will also focus on increasing the proportion of actively involved members.
- e) Increase board development: A strong Co-op also depends on a strong and high-functioning board of directors. The Co-op will prioritize the development of its board of directors through external trainings, clear policies and expectations, effective recruitment of high quality board members, and comprehensive board orientation.

Next Steps Include:

- Assess the current benefits of Co-op membership and seek feedback about additional benefits and services that members would value.
- Evaluate the current avenues for member involvement and their accessibility to both engaged and “shopper” members.
- Volunteer program assessment and recommendations
- Develop a workplan and job description for a membership coordinator
- Create realistic annual goals for increasing membership
- Hire a member outreach coordinator who will be responsible for developing concrete ways to engage current members and bring on new members.

- Complete the assessment of the volunteer program and implement recommendations for solidifying it (move to #1 if volunteer activities are addressed there)
- Begin implementation of board development program

Who is responsible: The tasks associated with this goal will be the responsibility of the Membership Committee of the board, in cooperation with the General Manager and (once hired) the Member Outreach Coordinator. Recommendations about the structure of the volunteer program will be the responsibility of the volunteer program committee.

Goal #2: MAKE THE CO-OP THE BEST PLACE TO WORK IN MOSCOW

Co-op staff are essential to the health of the Co-op, and the Co-op will continue to invest in its employees. Within ten years, the Co-op aspires to be the best place to work in Moscow. In the next five years, the Co-op plans to be able to offer exemplary wages (living wage +) and benefits for full-time staff, compelling staff incentives and rewards, and a professional, responsive human resources department.

Specifics:

- a) Develop the Co-op's Human Resources capacity by adding an HR department: An HR department comprising several professionals with different areas of expertise is essential to the health of an organization of the Co-op's size. Within the next three years, this department will be solidified and HR functions (currently spread widely across management) will be consolidated. This, in turn, will allow for better planning to improve working conditions at the Co-op.
- b) Invest in high-quality employees
 - Increase numbers of full-time employees and non-student employees
 - Encourage retention of all employees, through incentive programs, financial performance rewards, and other strategies.
 - Increase training and professional development opportunities for all staff. Key training topics include: Natural foods, customer service, safety (OSHA requirements, and leadership and management
 - Implement succession planning for management team and general manager.
- c) Provide (and maintain) living wages and benefits: Co-op staff qualify for full health care and other benefits once they work 30 hours per week. The Co-op is committed to bringing wages and benefits up to national standards for living wage and maintaining them at that level.
- d) Continue to be attentive to staff morale and responsive to staff concerns: The Co-op will move from assessing staff satisfaction every four years to assessing it every two-years, using a qualified third-party evaluator. Results from this assessment will be used to develop training programming, changing policies, developing rewards and incentives, and implementing staff retention strategies.

Next Steps Include:

Years 1-2

- Conduct an employee satisfaction survey
- Define HR function and job(s)

- Develop staff rewards and incentives for performance
- Define training and professional development needs/interests and develop plan for implementing robust program

Years 3-5

- Develop HR department
- Increase staff wages to achieve “living wage” benchmark
- Employee survey in year 3
- Continue to develop professional development and training program

Who is responsible: The tasks associated with this goal are the responsibility of the General Manager and staff managers in consultation with the board president.

Goal #3: BUILD THE LOCAL, ORGANIC, SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND GOODS ECONOMY

The Co-op has a stake in building and sustaining our region’s ability to produce and consume local, organic, and sustainable food and goods. This goal is central to our mission and belief in the “triple bottom line,” which means that our decisions must improve conditions for people, place, and profit.

At the heart of this goal is the Co-op’s deep desire to carry and promote more produce, meat, and goods that are grown and produced locally. Right now, local food and goods make up only about 10% of our total sales. To increase this percentage, the Co-op needs to collaborate with local growers and producers to provide more goods that our customers will buy.

Specifics:

- a) Facilitate a user-friendly process to help local growers and producers offer their products at our retail market: This could include:
 - establishing a grower advisory board that can identify grower and producer needs, understand obstacles, and identify solutions;
 - developing the ‘agility’ to recognize availability of local produce and food and purchase it – so that we are not tied to a distant wholesaler simply because of inertia;
 - determining the volume of total produce sales and identify what *could* be grown locally and developing a standing list of needs/volumes/prices so that Co-op managers and growers know the potential market; and
 - exploring opportunities and specific strategies to facilitate technical assistance and/or financial assistance to growers and producers – this might include partnerships with universities or local organizations.
- b) Support opportunities and venues that allow local growers and producers to offer products directly to customers: These opportunities include the Tuesday market, the Farmers’ Market, and other opportunities to publicize local farms, producers, and CSAs.
- c) Help to educate the community about the importance of local, organic food
- d) Continue to price Co-op goods in consideration of the following:

- Fair prices for local farmers and producers
- Fair wages for employees
- Real costs of organic, local foods
- Fair prices for shoppers
- Investment in co-op infrastructure

Next Steps Include:

Year 1:

- Establish a grower advisory board to help us understand capacity, interests, obstacles, etc.
- Determine volumes and prices for potential markets

Year 2:

- Partner with universities and local organizations to develop priorities for local food and produce to fill existing Co-op market volume. Identify needs and obstacles, as well as potential for providing technical and financial aid.
- Develop detailed plan for increasing local, organic food sources

Year 3-10: Implement plan to fill Co-op market volumes locally.

Who is responsible: The tasks associated with this goal will be the responsibility of the General Manager, in cooperation with Co-op staff and management team, with involvement from the Board of Directors and volunteers.

Goal #4: INCORPORATE VALUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY INTO FACILITY

The Co-op is more than a grocery store. It is also a community hub – a place where people go to meet and see friends, hear music, and learn new things. Because we want to be sure that the Co-op practices what it preaches, it is critical that the internal and external physical spaces reflect our deeply held values. Our ultimate goal is to become a zero-waste facility. In the short-term, we hope to become a model of energy self-sufficiency.

Specifics:

- Become a model of energy self-sufficiency to reduce our carbon footprint: Using green building benchmarks as a guide, the Co-op will take steps to increase its energy efficiency. Examples include the already initiated composting effort (the Earth Tub), adopting alternative energy and resource use as appropriate and pursuing sustainable operations and practices.
- Redesign the parking lot to be safer, greener, and to better reflect our values: configuration is already underway. Over the next two years, we will eliminate the Washington Street access and improve traffic flow, install a cob wall, more bike racks, and more trees, and improve the outdoor sitting and eating area.

- c) Be prepared to purchase the Co-op's current building if it becomes available: The Co-op now has the perfect downtown location. Because we lease the building, some changes and upgrades are more challenging, if not impossible, to implement. In the next five years, we will make sure that we are positioned to purchase the building, should it come up for sale. This includes maintaining and strengthening relationships with current owners and developing a buy-the-building fund.

Next Steps Include:

Year 1:

- Research and understand green building standards
- Catalogue existing efforts
- Prioritize next steps for improving environmental sustainability into a detailed action plan
- Finish parking lot project
- Consider preliminary steps that need to be taken to position Co-op for eventual building purchase

Year 2 - 3:

- Finalize detailed action plan and begin to implement recommendations.

Who is responsible: The existing sustainability committee, which includes board members and volunteers is the natural champion for the tasks associated with this goal.

Goal #5: INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, OUTREACH, AND EDUCATION

Specifics:

As a community hub, or *third* place, the Co-op performs many functions of a community nonprofit organization. It provides a gathering place. It sponsors educational experiences for children (Co-op kids) and adults (cooking classes) and partners with other local nonprofits (such as PCEI). It also provides community services, such as the Tuesday growers' market. The Co-op is committed to continuing to give back to the community and increasing the extent to which it can give back as it becomes more financially successful and sustainable.

One way to ensure that these important community activities continue and grow, without detracting from the Co-op's core function as a grocery store, might be to establish a nonprofit arm that can focus on the educational and community-building aspects of the Co-op's work. A nonprofit arm would be able to accept tax-deductible donations, and would be able to apply for foundation and government grants or accept donations from community members.

Because funding sources for nonprofit organizations on the Palouse are limited, the Co-op will approach this goal cautiously – making sure that it was not inadvertently duplicating efforts or competing for funding with other like-minded groups.

Next Steps Include:

Years 1-2:

- Develop an ad-hoc committee including at least one board member and several interested volunteers.

- Interview other Co-ops that have developed nonprofit arms to learn more about their experiences and the benefits and challenges of this approach.
- Inventory all current and desired Co-op programs that could fall under the auspices of a nonprofit arm
- Research the tax/legal implications of creating a nonprofit organization as part of a Co-op
- Speak with regional and local grantmakers to determine appetite for funding programs and efforts related to nutrition, sustainable local food economy, etc.
- If creating a nonprofit arm still seems feasible and desirable, begin application process
- Develop mission, vision, and goals
- Create board of directors
- Develop specific work plan for nonprofit arm

Who is responsible: The tasks associated with this goal will be the responsibility of an ad-hoc committee, led by a board member. This committee will make recommendations to the General Manager and the Board of Directors.