

Community How To

By Sage Liskey

~5th Year Edition~



** Community Theory * Communication **
** Resources for Starting Communities and Cooperatives **

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I.

Introduction

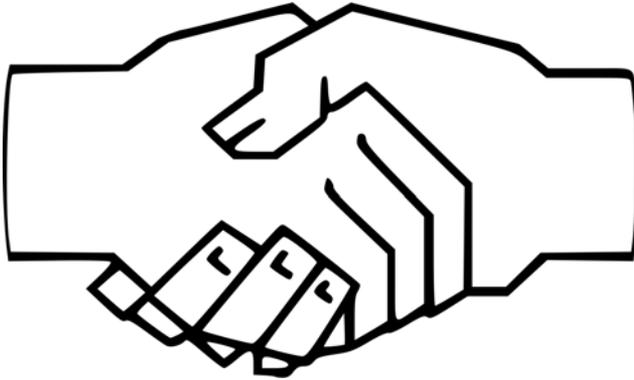
At the beginning of Fall, 2009, I moved into the Lorax Manner Student Cooperative. The name implied our devotion to living in a sustainable way and appreciation for Dr. Seuss's environmentally themed book *The Lorax*. A student housing cooperative located in Eugene, Oregon, our twenty-five housemates regularly cooked community meals, held benefit shows for various organizations, put on events like yoga and art shows, collectively bought local organic food in bulk, did weekly jobs, played music together, had conversations early in the morning and late into the night, spontaneously threw kitchen dance parties, and much more. We practiced non-hierarchical consensus-based decision making; that is, all members shared equal power with one vote, veto power, and the ability to host events, make changes to policy, and purchase community goods with the approval of all members. The individual had a lot of sway, but people who lived there knew a vote was made with the community in mind, not purely for themselves. While the Lorax Manner remained a welcome introduction to community living and a positive learning experience, it was not a utopia: Tensions could run high, people missed their jobs, there was unspoken anger and gossip over individual actions, members avoided directly confronting issues, and some hardly even participated at all in conversation and activities. Needless to say, sometimes people questioned how strong our community was.

As of the Winter of 2013, I no longer live in the Lorax Manner, but, while

different in some ways, the community continues to stand as a lively place with new energy pouring into it every season. I began writing this booklet while living there, desiring knowledge on how to build my beloved community stronger. I was asking questions: What does a stable community look like? What are our organizational problems? Given these new tasks, would the usefulness of this job increase? How do individual emotions influence the community as a whole? Some of these questions were answered through the ups and downs of experiencing a community household, but more helpful was a framework definition of community I found in research. The following pages depict my findings of what makes a solid community, the interpersonal dynamics of communication, and how to build your own community from the ground-up. Throughout I use the Lorax Manner as a case study for examples. While the Lorax Manner is considered an intentional community with people living closely together, everything described in this analysis applies to other communities as well. These include neighborhoods, towns, sports teams, businesses, classrooms and more.

II.

Sense of Community



Membership

The membership process creates a group of people that can relate to a shared culture, and rejects those who don't understand or refuse participation in it. It makes individuals feel like they are part of the community through “boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system” (Wright).

1) Boundaries

“Boundaries’ are marked by such things as language, dress, and ritual, indicating who belongs and who does not” (Wright 1. Membership). The boundaries of membership create a culture, a common ideology in which people relate to one another within the community.

In the Lorax Manner, dress usually consists of patched clothing and flannel, language uses shared terms such as “sparkle fingers” and “Loraxed,” and rituals include weekly meetings and the annual Pink Party and the Ally Bizarre. These characteristics create a culture members identify with and outsiders may or may not see they fit into.

2) Emotional Safety

The ability to speak emotions openly on any subject and express oneself freely is important for a member to feel a sense of security. Someone who shares touchy subject matter should not fear it turning into gossip or jokes. Someone who states an opinion should not be attacked with confrontational or violent forms of communication.

3) A Sense of Belonging and Identification

A community member should feel accepted by their peers and identify as part of the community. This entails interactions being made with respect and friendliness, and an understanding that differences in opinion and culture need to be discussed with an open mind. After all, everyone sees the world at least a little differently!

4) Personal Investment

Each member should have a desire to be with and work for the community. They should be excited about the community and want to apply themselves when possible. This means socializing in the common areas often and organizing and participating in activities put on by community members.

5) A Common Symbol System

According to McMillan and Chavis, “Understanding common symbol systems is a prerequisite to understanding community.... Groups use symbols such as rituals, ceremonies, rites of passage, forms of speech, and dress to indicate boundaries of who is or is not a member.”

For example, the symbols that define the Lorax Manner include twin trees, unicorns, pirates, organic food, heartarchy, anarchy, standing aside, down twinkles, patches, the rooftop, the sun, rats, parties, bike wheels, cops, and Dr. Suess's *The Lorax*.

Influence

The second part of McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community is “influence” (Wright 2. Influence). They assert that for a member to feel part of the community the individual must have power to influence the community and simultaneously the community must have power to influence the individual. This means that the individual feels empowered to change the community, but rules also govern how that individual can act within the community.

In the Lorax Manner Student Cooperative, anyone can propose policy changes, paint murals, or hold events, but as community members they have to finish their house jobs, help do security for public parties, and respect the privacy of their housemates. Their jobs require them to spend a certain amount of time in the house's common areas they might not otherwise, thus increasing potential interaction between members. Some jobs like cleaning areas of the house give a further sense of belonging by making people care about what happens to that area. They are no longer responsible for just themselves, but for everyone that interacts with that area, and

everyone that interacts with that area influences how much time they must spend cleaning. Having power to change their environment, they feel a sense of ownership. Obligated to abide by policies, there is a sense of being part of something great.

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

Next, the “integration and fulfillment of needs.” McMillam and Chavis actually use “need” in terms of something that is “desired and valued” rather than a necessity of life such as food or water (Wright 3. Integration and Fulfillment of Needs). The authors assert that if rewarded for performing positive actions in the community, an individual will feel a stronger bond to the community. This works just like positive reinforcement; people give you compliments and you feel better about your work and yourself, and probably feel compelled or willing to do something similar in the future. That, or you find similar positive actions to perform for the community.

As an active member of the Lorax Manner, I really appreciated the positive comments given for organizing outings to a local farm and holding community self-help meetings. Even when I felt discouraged when events were under-attended, the compliments I got for trying made me want to keep organizing them. It's great to have people positively acknowledge that they like what you're doing.

Shared Emotional Connection

Lastly, McMillam and Chavis state community needs to create a “shared emotional connection” and suggest a number of ways to accomplish this (Wright 4. Shared Emotional Connection). These include having “meaningful” social time, ensuring activities and conversations have a definitive ending, experiencing and

getting through difficult times together, putting energy into making the community a better place, rewarding people who positively influence the community, and also, although difficult to definitively say how, creating a “spiritual bond” between members.

1) Meaningful Social Time

Anyone can help facilitate the development of community by starting a conversation or getting people to do an activity. As more of these connections are made, a community dynamic forms.

For me, the most “meaningful” social time is either one-on-one conversations or group activities like riding bikes, sharing skills, or cooking together while having conversations that allows the participants to relate to one another. Others prefer bars and movies. So long as people are socializing, it's all relative.



Group Activities

In an analysis of “team cognitive research”, or the shared experiences and knowledge that a group of people has, researchers found that higher levels of “team

cognition” lead to boosts in motivation and performance (DeChurch 32). This is likely due to members caring about each other more as they form bonds of friendship. As a member of an Argentinian housing cooperative said, “Doing (construction) work together was useful, more than anything, because it made us become 'compinches' [buddies], even more than friends. We could laugh together, tease one another. Doing this work helped us 'convivir' [live together], generate the solidarity connections we talk about, no? That's what it was useful for” (Procupez 332). Friendship for the Argentinian cooperative did not form simply by living closely together, it formed through group activity. They learned each others' quirks and pasts, and how to rely on each other.

I speculate the construction work did not include the whole community though, and so they required more activities to allow everyone the opportunity to create friendly community connections. The Lorax Manner shares this characteristic. The community brings people together through parties, movies, cooking breakfast, weekly meetings, hot springs trips, and more. These activities can take a lot of energy to put on, but it can also provide happy memories and create a positive experience for everyone.

Perception of Crowding and the Dunbar Number

Comfort with social time can be hampered by the influence of crowding. A sense of crowding can have a number of negative impacts on the psyche including creating social withdrawal as a reaction to needing alone time or silence (Degliantoni 10-11). If people do not feel willing to interact, a huge blockade is immediately created in forming community. Robin Dunbar theorized the “Dunbar Number” which says that “there is a cognitive limit to the number of individuals with whom any one person can maintain stable relationships... [and] in turn limits group size...” (Allen). Based on “census data from various village and tribe sizes in many cultures”

the number roughly equates to 150 people. According to Christopher Allen, a network theorist, this upper margin only exists with a great amount of time spent socializing and building bonds between members. Otherwise the number drastically decreases to about 50 persons. When the crowding threshold breaks, relationships destabilize, social withdrawal spreads, and people begin taking each other for granted.

You see this impact in large cities, businesses, and communities. I've heard a number of travelers say that in bigger housing cooperatives in California there resides so many people that many don't know or hardly ever see a third or more of those living there. This in turn limits the community potential, as you have a lot of members unaware of happenings or not participating in the decision making process. Furthermore, if the community is not communicating, awareness of individual problems that members or a counselor might be able to help resolve are greatly slowed or impossible to know about until the problem blows out of proportion into deeply hurt feelings.

In the Lorax Manner, the roughly 25 members have fairly stable relationships and respect one another, though that varies between individuals giving a quick "hello" when seeing one member to having long conversations and hugs each day with another. More housemates means a bigger time commitment for developing strong friendships with everyone. As a secular student cooperative The Lorax Manner does not have an activity everyone enjoys and the student schedule creates a division in time any one person is around. In this sense the community may be too diverse for complete community cohesiveness. The deeper connections are usually formed between those members belonging to **cliques**, or ideologically similar minds. These cliques act to create a shared ideological and cultural grouping that focus the members' social time. In a relatively diverse community it is not realistic to be close with everyone, so for some the cliques are important in making meaningful friendships.

2) Experiencing Difficult Situations

Difficult situations are frustrating, can end friendships, and even result in community members feeling so distanced that they move out (Wright 4. Shared Emotional Connection). That said, they help a group grow structurally and emotionally by creating understanding of unrealized needs.

We once had a member in the Lorax Manner who almost never showed his face, missed most of the weekly meetings and some of his jobs as well. These actions resulted in a review of our housemate's membership. No one was really prepared for the review on an emotional or policy level. For whatever reason, there was a push to get the topic over with, to trust every vague statement our lackluster community member said, forgive, and then drop it. We never completed the full membership review, and afterward many people felt unsatisfied with what had happened, but had felt too shy speaking over those adamant about ending the process. The problems with our housemate did subside slightly, but were still present with missed jobs and a lack of presence in the community. We finally called another membership review after many attempts to address these problems.

The first membership review taught us to know the specific written policies and follow through fully once incited. We learned the processes of dealing with problems detrimental to the community. Everyone learned about what it means to be a community member, contrasting those who participated and this member who did not. That in turn gave our membership team ideas for new questions in the membership application to act as warning signs against non-participatory types. At the end of this awkward and difficult situation, our housemate decided to give us his 30 days notice instead of going to the second membership review meeting.

3) Conclude Discussions

Conversations started should be concluded out of respect and interest of the subject. Depending on the size of your community this can be difficult though. The Lorax Manner highlights this issue. With so many people living together, new voices are constantly entering and leaving the room, not to mention distractions from music playing or someone riding their bicycle around in circles. While it can make for an interesting day, I often found the environment frustrating and debilitating to making strong friendships. A conversation that keeps to a specific subject area and has a conclusion creates potential for participants to grow, learn, and better understand their peers. A conversation cut short or hijacked by a new subject area lowers this potential, and can create negative feelings. Interrupted conversations were best avoided by starting conversations away from the popular common areas, or moving to a new place to finish the conversation. There's also the option of acknowledging the interruption and saying "I'm really enjoying this conversation, let's continue it another time."

4) Putting Energy Into Making the Community a Better Place

Another important aspect of creating a shared emotional connection is by putting energy into your community and actively improving it. While living in my former community people would paint murals on the walls to make the house look better, hold workshops to expand knowledge on social issues or personal hobbies, rewrite policies for clarity, and much more. It's always great when people feel compelled to help the community grow, perhaps because it gives the community a new, refreshing feeling.

5) Rewarding people who positively influence the community

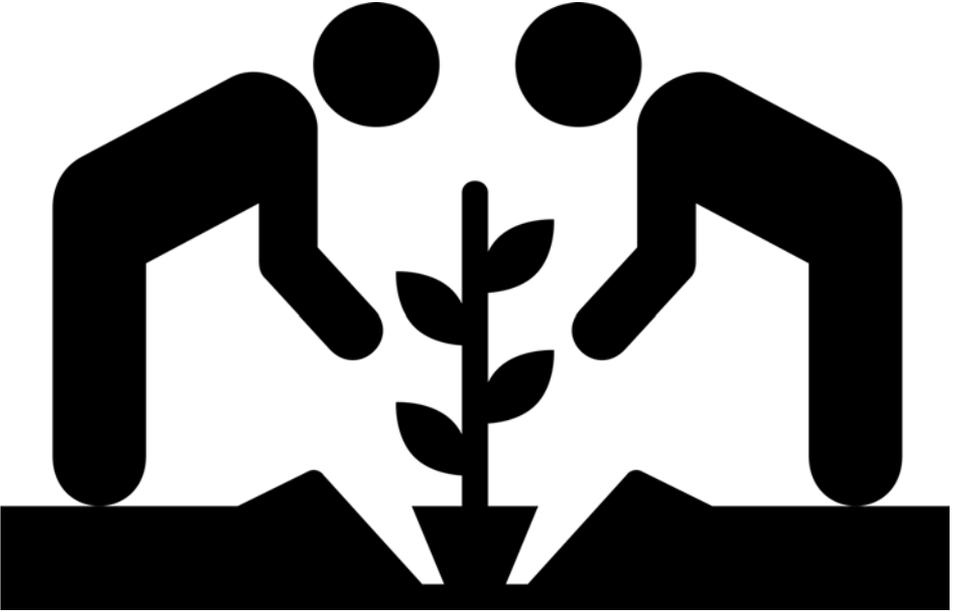
The act of rewarding behaviors you appreciate in the community makes it more likely those behaviors will happen again. Give a thank you, a hug, a letter of kind words, a song, or a cookie to show your gratitude. You could also help them out, or get inspired and do your own tasks to positively influence the community!

6) Spirit

I cannot say of ever having a sense of spirit in the Lorax Manner. I suspect it is a phenomenon that happens with great amounts of social time and experiences shared between members over a long period of time. Perhaps because the Lorax Manner is a transient community with four or more people moving out per school quarter, and up to fifty percent turn over between academic years, it makes a spiritual bond difficult. This paired with our dissimilar values and interests might cut out the experiences or time spent together required of a spiritual bond. On the other hand, I am uncertain of perspectives other than my own regarding the spirit.

III.

Communication



Having a solid grasp of communication is perhaps the most important aspect of being part of a community. Without it, no problems can be resolved, meetings can last hours longer than they need to, and people can passively aggressively store grudges against others without ever acting on their frustrations. This section discusses written versus verbal communication, people whose negative energy bring the whole community down (bad apples), non-violent communication, pros and cons of gossip, and the importance of having some amount of diversity to prevent groupthink.

Written vs. Verbal

According to a series of studies people “hear” e-mail messages differently than the sender does (Kruger 1). Although this study specifically used e-mail communication, I believe the conclusions can be applied to handwritten messages as well due to their commonality of lacking verbal language. The writer “perceives” the message to have the tone of their emotional state, but the reader fails transcribing the words into those emotions, and so misinterpretation occurs.

With consideration that a choice between speaking to a person and writing them exists, we find three implications. First with the issue of time, the reception and response of messages slows down in writing. As a result, issues take longer to resolve. The writer of the message also potentially becomes anxious contemplating how much time the responses is taking to receive. Secondly, using messages to resolve difficult situations can create an awkward sensation on both parties when resuming normal communication, even if through the messages the issue is resolved. Lastly, when we're not communicating with a person face to face, it is easier to dehumanize them and say hurtful things.

A number of my friends, and myself included, have used email or written messages to resolve problems. Either great uncertainty exists in how to respond emotionally after asserting yourself in a written emotional form, or the delayed response provides uncertainty and even paranoia over what response will come. While indirect communication can be useful in getting words out that would otherwise not, the best method of solving problems in my experiences is verbally, face to face.

Another example is with unsigned, passive aggressive messages that occasionally appeared on the Lorax Manner's community board. Sometimes I find them justified, such as in the case when a toilet is left unplugged, or a sink becomes

clogged because of water balloons. Other times, the messages are obvious misunderstandings, and because the writer is anonymous, they cannot be confronted. When living in a household where people interpret meanings differently, or are uneducated in the house's policies, ideas of what is right can clash. My only advice in these situations is to avoid judgment until you know the reason behind what is bothering you. In the case of misunderstandings, or where the culprit was unaware of wrongdoing, the messages create hurt feelings and tension in the community. Emergencies happen, and some people live with different lifestyles than your own. Open mindedness is essential in the community.

“Bad Apples”

William Felps has studied “bad apples,” people in workplaces whose negative output bring down everyone's mood and productivity (Gardner). When these people leave, almost immediately the mood lightens and productivity increases.

I've noticed that within the student co-ops a perpetually negative individual not only creates passive aggressive gossip against that individual, but also puts at least one or more people in a really terrible mood when the negative individual is around. Communication breaks down, people hang out less, and in general it ripples through the whole community from small to serious ways. Mediate with or remove these members if possible. Sometimes they just are not aware of their personality, and need a little push of help.

People can also temporarily become "bad apples." A person experiencing a bad day, or just plain sick of saying “hello” that morning, and doesn't acknowledge your presence, might create a negative ripple in the community. This is not nearly as serious as a “bad apple” but can still create hurt feelings. If you're on the receiving end of negativity, acknowledge that the individual's behavior is probably not purposefully

directed at you. Also ask what's wrong if they seem to be in a bad mood. On the other end, if you're actively having a bad day, communicate this so people know, and can possibly even help you alleviate your difficulties.

Non-Violent Communication



Even a highly cohesive community will experience negative moments. In these situations, reattaining community togetherness and personal happiness comes with proper communication. We often talked about the passiveness or passive aggressiveness of people in the Lorax Manner, but rarely confronted these people. Emotional detachment or gossip manifests much easier than direct confrontation or working to resolve an issue. Avoiding the issue neither helps the community nor helps yourself, it rather makes situations grow into larger and larger problems, so confront it!

Ann Garrido and Sheila Heen work in community studies and recognize that regardless of a person's beliefs, everyone runs into interpersonal conflicts (Garrido 15). In fear or humiliation of confronting a problem, violent

communication or passiveness can manifest from internalized emotions. Garrido and Heen have worked on methods to use nonviolent communication to solve these types of conflicts. They believe that openness about your internal feelings, discussion with all involved parties, and personal accountability for your part of the conflict are key in peacefully resolving a dispute (16-17). A community member must understand how everyone in the community reaches their personal happiness and make reasonable sacrifices of independence to accommodate that happiness. This goes both ways, so people find happiness and help others find happiness while retaining their core personality.

In the Lorax Manner sexist or homophobic remarks are strongly frowned upon by certain members, and their reactions find division between passive aggressiveness and informing individuals of their prejudiced words. The later functions to create a community of learning and establishes a space where all feel welcome. It might boil down to telling the offender, “I appreciate that you want to make people laugh, but please don't disrespect my identity.” More often than not, the offender is unaware that their words have that sort of hurtful message to people. Through new awareness we grow to accommodate more cultures, but it can be difficult to change, especially with a form of communication like gossip that has both a good and bad side. Read *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion* by Marshall Rosenberg to learn specific phrases and techniques for effective nonviolent communication.

Gossip

In “Beyond Home: Forging the Domestic in Shared Housing,” Valeria Procupez gives a research account of interpersonal relationships in a cooperative house, analyzing constructive and destructive gossip (Procupez 339). Procupez argues

that gossiping prevents the internalizing of feelings. It permits the observation and critical analysis of problems before addressing them in front of the whole community. Of course, gossip can also create a hurtful atmosphere for the person or people it relates to, in turn forming a distance between members of the community and their hurt ego.

In my former community of the student co-ops, some gossip took the form of relating mishaps, relationships, and passive aggressiveness. I witnessed gossip as beneficial, but also rude or uncalled for. If people gossip about a person missing their jobs for so and so reason, we could together devise a solution and if necessary bring it up in a meeting. On the other hand, people would occasionally gossip about someone becoming really drunk and embarrassing themselves. This gossip just perpetuated the embarrassment and does not help the community at all. Gossip can be beneficial or detrimental, but stopping the bad forms of gossip might take some serious rethinking of how some socialize.

Groupthink, Homogeneity, Diversity

Groupthink, the act of a homogenous group forming decisions less developed and rational than a more diverse group, creates one problem a community may encounter. However, debate exists about the research done on groupthink (Callaway 157). Some of the original research done by Irving Janis in the 1970s, while extensive, cannot be duplicated. In 1996 Chavis even updated his paper on the *Psychological Sense of Community*, saying that “perceived similarity to others and homogeneity...” helps foster relationships and the desire to act in good-will to the community. Nonetheless, I think having limited solutions suggested to solve a problem would logically result from group homogeneity. While I must stress that diversity should never be the first factor in accepting new members into a

community, one remedy might entail first finding community members that share the community identity and boundaries, and then further selecting members based on their skills, experiences, culture, and the like. A community that is too diverse will likely lead to increased conflict and greatly impede the community reaching cohesion or realizing goals.

Importance of Outside Communication

According to a study performed by the Department of Social Work at the California State University, those in retirement homes with outside social ties had a significantly lower risk of depression than those who simply socialized within the retirement home (Potts). I have had similar experiences where the stresses of my community can build to difficult levels if I never leave, but are relieved if I regularly get out to see other friends and attend events. This of course comes with a balance, because you still want to be an active community member. The best thing to do is be sure you are getting out of your community at least once a week, and to care for your community within the limits of your sanity.

IV.

Forming a Community

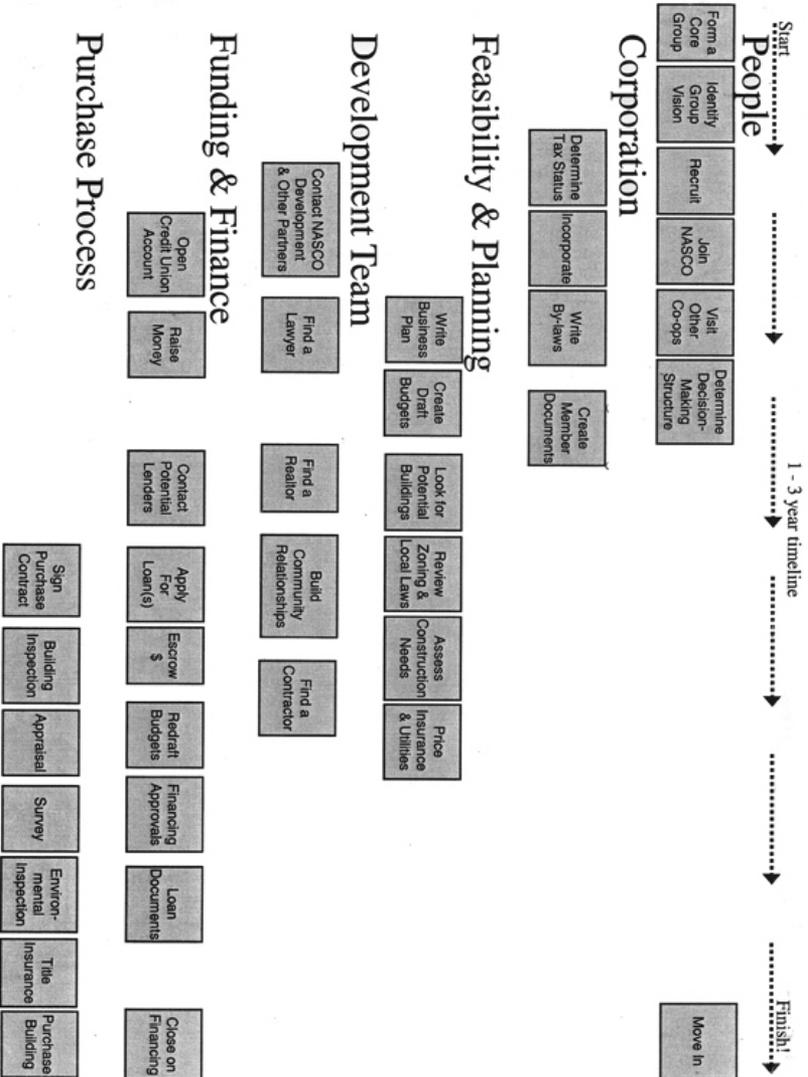


Illustration 1: Gregor - Timeline of a Cooperative Housing Project

Forming a community can be a very simple monthly potluck of friends to a very complex and tedious buying of a building and converting it into a house of cooperative principles. Whatever your aim, here are some pointers to help you out.

Resources

Many resources exist for forming a community. There are housing grants available, cooperative grocers to buy into, and probably projects already underway where you live. Here are some good places to start:

1) North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO)

www.nasco.coop/

The North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO) homepage, helping create, network, and expand student housing cooperatives. NASCO also hosts a gathering each year in the fall time with many workshops on building community.

2) Student Cooperative Association (SCA)

<http://sites.google.com/site/scawiki/>

The Student Cooperative Association wiki page. Based in Eugene, Oregon, has the policies, history, job descriptions, ideas, and more from the three student cooperatives it runs, including the Lorax Manner.

3) The National Association of Housing Cooperatives

www.coophousing.org

Much like NASCO, but for a wider array of types of cooperatives.

4) The Cultivate Coop Wiki

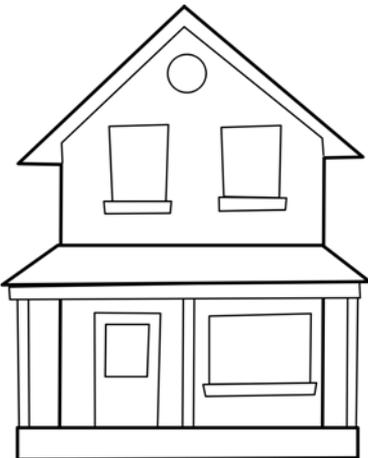
<http://cultivate.coop>

An open source wiki page on cooperatives, community, and the economics tying it together.

5) You

The greatest resource is your own determination. Set up a meeting. Hand out fliers. Ask your neighbors if they would tear down their fences to create a shared garden. Have a potluck. Remember, the most important thing is working together and sharing experiences, so have fun with it.

Developing New Cooperatives



Starting a new community house or cooperative business can be a very involved process, but also amazingly rewarding. If you're interested in taking on the task, I suggest reading the NASCO Organizer's Handbook available free on their website, <<http://www.nasco.coop/development>>. In the following paragraphs I've also included snippets from the 2011 NASCO

Cooperative Education and Training Institute on developing new cooperatives, but focus on the initial part of getting started. NASCO's 'Developing Cooperatives' track included 'Getting Organized,' 'Creating a Business Plan,' 'Obtaining Tax Exempt Status (501C3),' 'Assessing Financial Feasibility,' and 'Purchasing a Building.' Please see the developing new cooperatives timeline at the beginning of this chapter for a visual image of 'all' the steps involved.

1) Getting Organized

Adapted from a presentation by Mark Fick and Michael Gregor and republished with their permission. This 'Getting Organized' covers the starting point of any house or land purchasing project for a community.

Building Your Group

Start by getting the word out through fliering, radio broadcasts, social media, and potlucks. Include your basic vision, the area you want to start your cooperative, your values, your meeting dynamics, and anything else you might think is important as a general start. These things do not need to, and perhaps should not be, set in stone.

The goals of this stage include:

- Developing mission and goal statements.
- Airing potential conflicts and disagreements early. Who wants to be involved? What do you want to achieve? Community size? Meals together? Parties? Quiet? Find out together!
- People beyond yourself taking ownership of the organizing. You get to know each other, commingle, and brainstorm. Allow participation in the planning of how to recruit, the rent costs, goals, etc. Do not be a dictator!

- Beginning the work of balancing individual needs and desires with group needs and desires. You will have conflict and disagreement.

Building Relationships and Common Ground

- Talk to each person interested in developing the community for roughly an hour or more to figure out 'why are we here together?' Get to know the people interested in being part of the project! Try to have at least two of these meetings a year.
- Structure in retreats and trips to different environments for your planning group to brainstorm in.

Create A Formal Group Structure

- Decide on a decision making process. (consensus, majority rules, etc.).
- 'Finalize' a mission statement to let people know what you do.
- Establish social and organizational ties. Hold meetings for business (planning, etc.) and meetings for socializing (potlucks, recruiting new planning committee members, etc.) separately.
- Decide on membership criteria and membership recruitment procedures. Is there an income limit? Experience criteria? Create fair laws. You will need to be aware of and incorporate non-discrimination laws as well as tenant-landlord laws. It is okay to discriminate against those who don't pay rent or breach their contract though! Be sure to have an effective procedure for removing problematic members.
- Create advertisements for recruiting members. Keep in mind how the images and words used target the specific population of members you are looking for.

Development Process

See the 'timeline of a cooperative housing project' at the beginning of the chapter. Also see the 'NASCO Organizer's Handbook' on their website at <<http://NASCO.coop>>.

2) Cooperative Business Planning

Adapted from a presentation by Emily M. Lippold Cheney. 'Cooperative Business Planning' covers the creation of a business plan which helps guide you and your community as well as gives you credibility to organizations and persons you may be seeking money from. It explains the who, what, where, why, when, and how of your house, community, business, and/or land project and spans 6 to 60 pages.

Why?

The business plan is for communication to others. It gives you ideas about what you want, records history, legitimizes your project, and conserves time by preventing myths and preconceived notions of, for instance, what an intentional community is. If the project is temporarily dropped or handed off to someone else, picking it back up is considerably easier. It also is a means of saying a lot of information to interested persons without interruption

But How?

Do it as a group and delegate tasks. Also incorporate creative writing for flair.

-Spinner - Writes documents, attracts new members, and wins contracts.

Good with creative writing skills.

-Designer - Designs the writing into something more appealing than plain

text. Your plan needs a consistent and uniform design. It is suggested to use a template and have a logo.

-Weaver - Puts it all together. Calls people who are late and reminds everyone about deadlines. Proof reads, edits, and cuts up and pastes together the document. Ensures natural flow and smoothness of writing. Needs good language skills.

The Business Plan Document

The essential elements of a core document include the 'Summary I' and 'Summary II,' but also the 'Management,' planned 'Market,' 'Marketing' targets and strategies, a discussion of the 'Financial' aspects, 'Risk Assessment' of your project, 'Goals, Objectives, and Benchmarks,' a 'Conclusion and Bibliography,' and an 'Appendix.' Make the plan for 3-5 years. You want to know for the long haul if you have lender's money. Please see the NASCO Organizer's Handbook for more information on these aspects of creating a business plan.

3) Obtaining Tax Exempt Status and Applying for Corporate Status (Incorporation)

Adapted from a presentation by David Sparer. This section will only cover a very brief overview of applying for tax exempt status and incorporation. Please see other documents or the NASCO Organizer's Handbook for a more thorough explanation.

Tax Exempt Status

-Benefits

With a 501(C)(3) (non-profit) or other similar tax except status, you pay no

taxes at all on the income you make, such as with rent. This includes when selling a building. You also qualify for a number of grants as a non-profit, not-for-profit, or other similar group.

-Requirements

The regulations on tax exempt status change depending upon your state. Generally you must be an association or a business to apply. After becoming one of these entities you must apply to become a 501(C)(3) within a certain amount of time in the realm of 1 or 2 years. Several other tax-exempt titles do not have time restraints though if you miss this time frame.

-Application Paperwork

You will file a 1023 form, or “Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code” to apply for 501(c)(3) status. It is confusing, long, and will be much easier with professional help or by asking others who have gone through the process.

- Part IV, “Narrative Description of Your Activities,” is considered the most important part as a 1 page overview of your doings.
- If you supply a website or photo material, do not be shown selling anything!
- If your co-operative is specifically low-income housing themed, you should talk about it in conjunction with the IRS Low-Income Housing Guidelines form Rev. Proc. 96-32. The IRS will like you a little more, so try to incorporate low-income housing as much as possible in this and other sections.

Incorporation

-Benefits

Incorporation, or the act of becoming a corporation, has many benefits

especially as a community. This status allows you to have protection of individual member assets. The individual is no longer liable and their assets cannot be taken in the case of bankruptcy. Under the corporate entity you can open a bank account, buy and sell things, hire people, and so on.

-About

- You must file the Articles of Incorporation to become a corporation.
- After filing you will have a time limit at which at its end you can no longer file to become a 501(c)(3).
- Even if not required in your state, you should file your by-laws to the IRS.
- It is highly suggested that you add a number of provisions to your 'Purpose Clause' as well as 'Dissolution Clause.' You are basically required to have these, but are not told that you do. Those helping you fill out these documents should know. They include things like promising not to give money to anyone except staff, not lobbying politically, and stating what associations your corporation's assets will be given to upon dissolution.

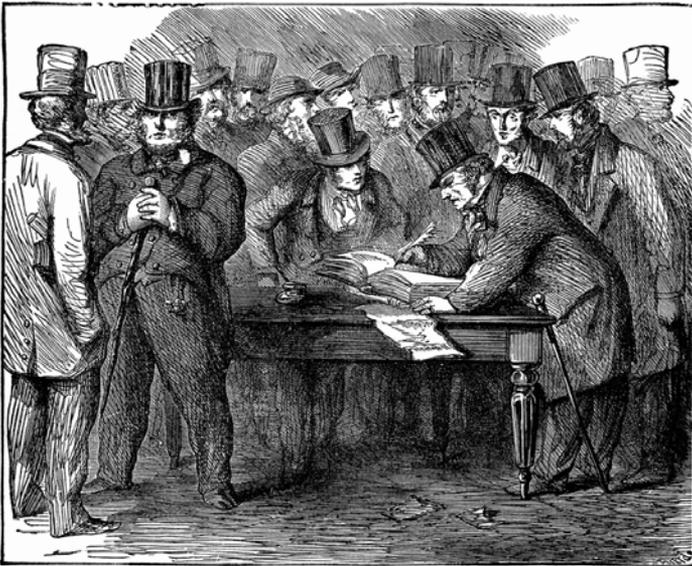
4) Assessing Financial Feasibility: What Can You Afford?

So you've selected out some property you absolutely love, but can you afford it? Look at your financing options. Can you take out a loan? Are there city, state, federal, or private housing grants available for a project like yours? How much are individual members willing to invest into the project? Are your neighbors or family willing to loan you money for a small interest rate? Are your neighbors or family willing to donate money? Can you raise money through benefit events? Creating a budget and elaborating into the future for your project is essential.

5) Purchase or Lease a Building

Beyond just affording the building, there are many technical items to be aware of. How many people are you legally allowed to have living in that building? Will you need to retrofit it with new electricity, plumbing, bathrooms, showers, and other rooms? Are there special noise considerations to be aware of in the neighborhood? Is there any foundational, wall, ceiling, or roof damage that should be repaired? Be aware of your local housing regulations.

Community Structure



There are millions of different ways you can structure your community. Here are some ideas and good starting points to consider when developing yours.

1) Mission Statement

Deciding on a mission statement can be very useful in determining your goals and the type of people you are seeking as members. A good mission and how

well it is followed will greatly determine the stability of your community

Eugene's Student Cooperative Association has a mission statement of providing low cost student housing. The Lorax Manner does not have a direct mission statement, but the name implies one of dedication to the environment. This is at times (or often) disregarded but still provides a core ideology for people to seek out the community through.

2) Policies and Rules

Policies or rules are good for keeping the community running. It is unfortunate but our society and culture thrives on deadlines. Many can neglect one another and their community without some structure. You can see it at the Lorax Manner during the summertime when there are no house jobs and the rules are often ignored. Some people love it without responsibilities, others seem to be on the brink of insanity with their frustration of cleaning up after others and loud noises at all odd hours. The rules in place help people feel safe and respected in their home. These policies include paying rent on time, doing jobs, parking in the right areas, not smoking or having pets in the house, meeting policies, guest policies, and so on. The established policies are a good foundation for everyday activity but there is the flexibility to change them or selectively ignore them when necessary or desired.

3) Voting

There are several commonly used types of voting in communities. Depending on the size of the community, its cohesiveness, and what is being voted on, different forms may work better than others.

Consensus and Consensus Minus One

Consensus is based around the idea that everyone should feel comfortable with the outcome of a decision. Everyone has veto power, or if people feel a proposal is bad for themselves but good for the community, they can stand aside. Three stand aside is equivalent to a block. There is a lot of compromise involved in consensus, and it can be very time consuming discussing everyone's feelings and concerns about a proposal. But because everyone has equal say, it forces the community to communicate with one another better as well as realize everyone's needs as individuals.

Consensus works best in smaller groups, though I've heard it working with several hundred people as well. This may have been done with consensus minus one, where two blocks are required to veto a decision. Consensus minus one is based around the idea that one person shouldn't be able to control the decision of the whole community. That said, after a proposal has been blocked, discussion on the subject can continue until the concerns are addressed or tabled until the following meeting.

With thirty house members, I've usually seen the consensus process work, but have also experienced the consensus process fail. People sometimes don't raise concerns but then stand aside, or even when there is overbearing proof someone is wrong, their pride is too great to admit it and they still stand aside or threaten to block the proposal. In these cases, communication directly with the individual is necessary after the meeting. If the problems persist, that person maybe shouldn't belong to the community.

More about consensus can be found at the NASCO website and others listed above. There is a lot involved in the consensus process from hand signals, facilitating positions, and a specific community-oriented mindset.

Half Plus One Majority and Two-Thirds Majority

Majority voting is useful with large groups of people, or when there are very opposing viewpoints. As noted previously in the writing, as the number of people increases in a community, the tendency towards individualistic actions increase. Unfortunately, the outcome of a majority vote may be oppressive to the minority and create negative feelings.

A way to avoid some bitter feelings is increasing the majority required to pass a proposal. Two-thirds is often used. Many communities use half plus one majority for deciding elected positions, and two-thirds majority for voting on proposals.

4) Jobs

It is useful to have a system for delegating jobs in a community. There are many different ways to set up a job system. Some communities do it by lottery. Others do it with job rotations. Still others do it with members choosing a job each week.

The Lorax Manner uses a combination of elections and lottery to delegate jobs to members for the school term. Each job has a point value, where a point is roughly equivalent to 30 minutes of work, and everyone has to fulfill an equal number of points based on the number of members and total number of points between the jobs. For instance, having a weekly shift on the dinner dishes is worth 3 job points.

For elections, people nominate either themselves or others, and then the nominees do speeches on how they'd be good for the position. We have all nominees leave the room, do more discussion, then vote to decide the election.

For lottery, each person draws a number from a hat with the numbers starting at 1 and going up to the number of members there are in the house. An elected job coordinator has already figured out how many points each person needs and begins counting up from 1. People are skipped in correspondence with how many

elected jobs they have (1 elected job = 1 skip, 2 elected jobs = 2 skips, etc.). When the highest number is reached, that number is repeated and then the count goes backwards. This continues until everyone has at least the required number of points. It's tedious and often needs some switching around near the end, but is relatively fair and works with large groups of people. Work not covered by elected or lottery jobs is done through work parties. The community sets up several days during the school quarter where everyone pitches in on cleaning and maintaining parts of the house. I really appreciated work parties, because everyone worked together, whereas most other jobs were very individualistic in nature.

When it's all said and done, the Lorax Manner's job board is quite expansive. They have lunch and dinner shifts almost every single day, dish shifts every day, and a cleaning shift for almost every part of the house. As for elected jobs, they have a meeting facilitator, treasurer, secretary, membership coordinator, two differently gendered conflict resolution advisory coordinators' (CRACs), interim coordinators, granola makers, a seed/nut milk maker, a recycling coordinator, compost coordinator, bike drivers for picking up food, bicycle maintenance, event coordinators, a historian, internet maintenance, maintenance coordinators, job coordinators, and a kitchen coordinator for buying food and other house supplies. Every once in awhile a vote adds a new position if deemed necessary, though many people are against increasing the number of points on the job board.

5) Non-Participatory Members

It is the sad fate of communities that not every member will be a good member true to completing their jobs and actively participating in bettering the community. Communication is key in these cases, as too often people are silently angry on either side and never speak up. The next step if they cannot be reasoned

with is going through formal processes of kicking them out. Be sure you have a process for removing these people, because they will drag the community down. The Lorax Manner votes people out with a membership review for discussion then a two-thirds majority vote for kicking them out.

6) Meetings

Having a specific time at regular intervals (weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly) where everyone in the community is present is very important. At the very least the meeting allows for people to propose community events or improvements and discuss feelings or problems. For the Lorax Manner, this is one of the few times everyone in the house gets together, so it is somewhat special. After business is adjourned, you can also follow it up with games and socializing!

7) Spiritual, Religious, and Secular Communities

Religious intentional communities usually last longer than do secular ones (Utopias). Why? Religious intentional communities have a strong shared belief that establishes their daily actions, values, ethics, and morals. As everyone shares a common knowledge of how people should act and individual roles, members of the community can more easily make decisions or correct poor behavior without running into serious arguments of right and wrong. Religious groups also have rituals, ceremonies, and meetings required of all members for their spiritual well-being. As noted in the “Shared Emotional Connection” section, teamwork and friendship are created through performing activities together, so a very strong connection is built from a religious community's many shared experiences.

Spiritual and religious communities find further strength in the many examples available throughout history to base their communities on. Secular

communities tend to each be unique and need to create their whole community structure from nothing. Secular communities should take note how important it is to have a strong shared belief!

Balance

Be aware of the membership pool you are bringing in. An overabundance of certain dynamics will greatly alter the community's vibe, or even potentially be detrimental to it. Some hobbies, personalities, and life decisions take a person away from being a strong community member. Consider the following balances:

- Activist/Volunteer to Homebody/Party Oriented
- Singles to Couples
- Gender
- Students to Workers

In the Lorax Manner, too many couples lead to a great decrease in the amount of time people spent together communally. Too many activists working outside of the community also decreased the sense of community. When the gender balance became too strong in any direction another gender often felt marginalized.

Ideas for Building Community

- Host a potluck.
- Tear down your fence.
- Hold an activity at your house (board games, movie night, yoga, meditation).
- Introduce yourself to everyone that lives on your block.

- Share tools.
- Create a workshop.
- Host a neighborhood garage sale.
- Have a neighborhood 'house to house' party.
- Let neighbors know the skills and resources you have to share.
- Create a neighborhood tool share.
- Ask the community to pitch in for a community fund.
- Advertise neighborhood councils to gather and pressure the city to do this or that thing you want to see happen.
- Put up art around your neighborhood!
- Put a community message board in your front yard so people can communicate new events.
- Put up a poetry sharing board.
- Share bills such as internet and garbage collection.
- Paint fire hydrants and utility boxes.
- Plant fruit trees for the public.

V.

Conclusion



All together, McMillan and Chavis' "sense of community" is attainable only when individuals allow their minds to be open and reliant on others. The interdependence that forms afterward has great possibilities in helping one live resourcefully and happily. There are, however, variables that keep the community stable and functional. Culture, personality, community structure, and much more can change the potential for group cohesion. Community, most of all, is a growing experience. While one should hold the core values supported by the community, it does not require a person to fit an exact role coming in. New members can be secular,

religious, shy, outgoing, or any race or ethnicity and still find acceptance if everyone is willing to try with an open mind. I strongly encourage everyone to seek out a community to join or to create their own. At the very least, you will understand what it means to be human, working together with many people in friendship and mutual trust.

VI.

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Sage Liskey is an author, poet, workshop presenter, mental health advocate, and artist. He founded the Rad Cat Press in 2010 and is based out of Oregon. The Rad Cat Press is devoted to creating life-changing and accessible publications for the modern world.

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