

## **What is Co-op Housing?**

Co-operative housing is a unique way of renting a home. People join housing co-ops because they want housing that is:

- decent
- affordable, and
- secure

### **Who runs the co-op?**

They people who live in the co-op are its members. The members are responsible for managing the co-op. They control it.

There is no landlord. Members elect a board of directors from among themselves. The board oversees the running of the co-op. Many co-ops hire staff who do the day-to-day work. The members make the big decisions.

Each member has one vote to decide things like:

- the rent the co-op will charge (co-ops call it a housing charge)
- the selection of members of the board
- rules and by-laws for the co-op

Housing charges go up only when costs go up. Co-ops are non-profit.

### **Who owns the co-op?**

The units belong to the co-op. The co-op leases them to the members. No one can buy or sell the units. Usually co-ops set aside some units for people with special needs.

### **Who lives in co-ops?**

All kinds of people live in co-ops. Anyone who wants decent, affordable, secure housing can apply. Members work together for the co-op and this gives them a sense of belonging. It also makes them proud of their co-op community.

## **How can I apply to live in a co-op?**

It is slightly different in each co-op. Here are the common steps in the application process.

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|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Information Meeting</b> | The first step in some co-ops will be an information meeting. Co-op members will tell you about their co-op. This will help you to decide if you want to live in the co-op. Some co-ops do not have this meeting. They give you this information at their office. |
| <b>Application Form</b>    | The second step is to apply. You fill in a detailed application form. You must give all the information the form asks for.  |
| <b>Interview</b>           | The third step will be an interview. This will give you a chance to find out more about the co-op. You can ask all your questions.  |

## **What happens after I apply?**

Once you have give the co-op your completed application form, the co-op will:

- do a landlord and credit check
- interview all the adults who are applying
- recommend applicants to the board of directors for approval as members
- tell you the board's decision
- put you on a waiting list
- call you when a unit is available

### **What happens when a unit is available?**

If the board has approved you as a member, and a unit is available, the co-op will invite you to:

- look at the unit
- make a deposit to hold the unit
- set a date for move-in

### **What do I do before moving in?**

You will pay the last month's housing charge a month before move-in. You will go to the co-op about a week or ten days before move-in to get the keys for the unit. You will also pay any remaining fees and sign papers (e.g. the co-op's version of a lease).

Fees may include:

- the first month's housing charge,
- the last month's housing charge (if you have not already paid it),
- a maintenance or damage deposit,
- a one-time membership fee

### **How long will I have to wait to get a unit?**

It may take some time to get into a co-op. The length of time varies from one co-op to another. But remember that, once you are in a co-op, you can stay as long as you like if you respect the by-laws and rules of the co-op.

### **Can I get a subsidy?**

Not everyone can afford to pay the co-op's housing charge. This is why most housing co-ops get financial assistance from the government. Each co-op has a certain percentage of units that get a subsidy. You can apply for subsidy before you move in or at any time afterward. Because many co-ops have long waiting lists for subsidy, you may not get a subsidy as soon as you apply.

Every household that asks for a subsidy must give proof of its total income. This lets the co-op work out how much the household can pay. Members who get a subsidy pay about 30% of their total income. Total income is the income before tax. We call it "gross income". The government pays the subsidy for these households directly to the co-op.

### **How do I apply for a subsidy?**

Fill in the application form for subsidy. Ask the co-op if you qualify and if there is a waiting list. If you qualify for a subsidy, the co-op will ask for more details about your income. All this information is confidential. The co-op will set the housing charge (rent) you will pay. You will have to tell the co-op when your income goes up or down. Your subsidy may go up or down when your income changes. You will have to give a new proof of income once a year even if your income does not change.

### **Volunteerism**

Co-ops rely heavily on volunteers. Members who live in the co-op volunteer their time by being on the Board of Directors or a committee. The most common committees in the co-ops are:

Membership  
Maintenance  
Finance  
Landscaping  
Social  
Newsletter

Many co-ops have other committees as well. Some of these are ongoing committees. Others meet to plan or carry out a specific event and then disband.

Being a volunteer does mean spending time on an activity. But it is also a chance for people to have a say in their housing.

Members can volunteer in ways other than being on the board or a committee. They can:

- help with the physical upkeep of the co-op,
- assist other members,
- babysit so others can attend meetings,
- phone to let other members know about meetings, etc.

Most co-ops ask members to volunteer at least 4 hours per month.

## **Co-operative Principles**

### **Open Membership**

Co-ops are open without exception to anyone who needs their services and freely accepts the obligations of membership.

### **Democratic Control**

Co-ops are controlled by their members, who together set policy, make decisions and elect leaders who report to them. In primary co-ops each member has one vote.

### **Economic Participation**

All members contribute fairly to their co-ops, which they own in common. Co-ops pay a limited return (if any) on money people have to invest to become members. Surpluses are held for the future or used to improve the co-op's services.

### **Independence**

All agreements co-ops sign with outside organizations or governments should leave the members in control of the co-op.

### **Co-operative Education**

Co-ops offer training to their members, directors and staff. Co-ops tell the public what they are and what they do.

### **Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Co-ops work together through local, national and international structures to serve their members.

### **Community**

Co-ops meet members' needs in way that build lasting communities inside and outside each co-op.