Business Support – help for your co-op: Application guidance

Introduction

Help for your co-op is a business support programme for existing co-ops that have been incorporated and trading for more than 18 months and submitted financial accounts.

If you have not started trading or have been incorporated for less than 18 months, then this programme is not for you. Instead, you should apply for our programme for start-ups.

Before you start your application, we recommend you read this application guidance carefully. It includes information about:

- The application process and how we assess your application
- The documents and information you need to gather before you apply
- A preview of all the questions you will be asked in the form

We advise you to prepare as much as possible in advance. You can download a copy of this guidance as a pdf file by clicking on 'download pdf' button on the side menu.

Commitment fee

If you are awarded the support package, you will be asked to contribute a £100 commitment fee (inclusive of VAT) or £75 for Co-operatives UK members. The fee has proven to be the best approach to ensure the support is allocated to teams that are truly committed to participating in the programme. Co-operatives UK reinvests the funds into future support provision. If the fee is a barrier to your participation in the programme, please let us know in your application and we will consider waiving the fee.

About the programme

Help for your co-op offers

- Up to six days of one-to-one support with a co-op expert
- Half a day of peer-support with an existing co-op

One-to-one support from a co-op expert

You can receive up to six days of one-to-one support with a co-op expert tailored to your specific needs. It will usually involve a combination of some of the following types of support:

- Reviewing or developing a business plan
- Financial review and planning
- Reviewing or developing your organisational strategy
- Market development strategy (user research, marketing and customer engagement)
- Review and modification of articles or rules
- Reviewing or developing a membership strategy
- Improving your democratic processes (can include sociocracy)
- Defining a fundraising strategy (can include community shares)
- Succession planning
- HR, including redundancy

Six days of support will not be able to cover all the topics above, so we will ask you to indicate your top three priorities.

The support will be delivered by a co-op expert that is part of our extensive network of advisors located across the UK. You may choose your own advisor from the network or leave it to us to choose the most appropriate for your organisation. If your application is successful, we will make every effort to allocate you your preferred support advisor. However, we reserve the right to offer an alternative based on availability, geography, skills and experience.

Peer support from another co-op

Peer support is a great opportunity to learn from an existing co-op. They will have the lived experience of running a co-op similar to yours and can offer you insight into the challenges you might encounter and how to overcome them. You can get into the details of running the business or simply visit their premises to get a sense of their day-to-day activities. Once we have assigned you a co-op for peer support, it will be up to you to define with your peer co-op how to best make use of this time.

In your application form you can suggest the co-op you would like to be paired with, or you can leave it to us to propose the most appropriate co-op. You can find other co-ops by exploring our directory of co-ops. If your application is successful, we will make every effort to allocate you your preferred co-op. However, we reserve the right to offer an alternative based on availability, geography, skills and experience.

Allocation of support

We aim to support as many applications as possible but unfortunately cannot support all, so we will prioritise those where we think the support can be most impactful.

The allocation of support will depend on the following criteria:

- That your co-op cannot access this support elsewhere via Co-operatives UK's advice team or funded programmes
- The confidence we have that your organisation has capacity to benefit from the support
- How impactful we think the support could be to help you achieve your aims
- If you have a valid business model
- If we see that the co-op model is a central part of your business model

The application form is designed to help you explain these aspects, so please provide the appropriate information when prompted.

Co-operatives UK is also keen to support co-ops that are led by, employ or support people who identify with groups that are under-represented or discriminated against in the business and third sector, in the workplace or in their communities. Equity and solidarity are core values of the co-operative movement so we will consider these aspects when prioritising applications. The application questions related to these points are not compulsory but please consider them when applying and highlight them where appropriate in your application.

Finally, we will be prioritising applications that are aligned with Co-operatives UK's strategy. This is working to build a strong, sustainable and diverse UK co-operative movement that positions co-operatives as a better way to do business and transform people's lives. In particular, we might prioritise applications where one or more of the following points applies:

- Your co-op will be led by, employ or support young people (18-35 years old)
- Your co-op brings innovation to the co-op sector. You may be filling a gap in the market, responding to market failure or creating alternative solutions to specific issues
- Your co-op and the support you receive is a learning opportunity for the co-operative movement

However, these are not eligibility criteria, so please apply even if your co-op does not fit in this list of priorities.

Application process

To access the support, you must fill in an application form.

We accept applications on a rolling basis and assess them in regular assessment panel meetings which happen every 4-5 weeks.

Once we have received your application we will first check if it fits our eligibility criteria.

- If it does not, we will write to explain why and will provide you guidance on other steps you can take
- If it does, we will submit it to the panel for a full assessment and inform you of the next panel date

We may also arrange a call in advance of the panel to discuss your application in more in detail.

If you would like your application to be considered for the next panel session, please submit it at least 10 working days in advance. Below is a list of the panel dates and the deadline for submitting your application for that panel date. Please submit by 5 pm on the deadline date. Please note, due to Summer holidays, there will be no panel meeting in August.

If your application has been submitted to the panel for full assessment, we will notify you of the result within 10 working days of the panel date. If your application is successful, we will then start co-ordinating the support package with you.

Application deadline	Panel date
20 September 2026	30 September 2026
7 October 2026	21 October 2026
15 November 2026	25 November 2026
30 November 2026	15 Dec 2026

How to apply

1. Make sure you are eligible for the programme
2. Prepare your questions in advance. You can read the form questions on the next page, where you can also download a word/pdf document with all the questions
3. Gather in advance all the information you need to include in your applications. In particular, you will also need to provide your co-op's:
    - Registration number. This is the number your organisation is given when it registers with the relevant registration body, i.e. Companies House or the Financial Conduct Authority.
    - Incorporation date
    - Legal form
    - Turnover for the previous year
4. Fill in the application form. If you need to save your application at any stage, please follow the 'save my progress and resume later' instructions.
5. Review and submit your application

If you have any questions, please get in touch with us at support@uk.coop

We look forward to receiving your application.

Application form preview

Download a preview of the application form

PLEASE NOTE to apply for this programme you will need to fill in an ONLINE application. The downloadable templates will allow you to prepare your application in advance.

We have word and pdf versions available.

If you have any issues accessing this guidance, please email support@uk.coop

Word version

This will download to your computer and allow you to write your answers into the document to help you prepare in advance.

Word preview

Download

Pdf version

This will likely open within your browser. You can right click on the button below and select 'open link in new tab' so you don't navigate away from this page.

Pdf preview

Download

Start your application

Before you apply

1. Make sure you've read all of the guidance on these pages and you know you are eligible to apply

2. We strongly recommend preparing your answers in advance before starting your application

Ready to apply?

You can save your application at any stage – simply follow the 'Save my progress and resume later' instructions on the form.

Start your application

Next step

https://www.uk.coop/resources/business-support-help-your-co-op-application-guidance

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