Inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance



Introduction

This guidance has been created to support co-operatives to put into practice and fully embed the democratic and participatory ambitions already embedded within the Co-operative Corporate Governance Code.

By building inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance cultures – where young people and other underrepresented groups can participate meaningfully and effectively – boards are better equipped to reflect their memberships, respond to social change and sustain long-term organisational resilience.

This guidance on inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance will support boards to:

- Reflect on governance culture, behaviour, and power dynamics
- Review recruitment, onboarding, and participation practices
- Strengthen inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance without tokenism
- Create pathways for meaningful participation and progression

While this guidance is centred on co-operative boards, its principles are transferable across the

wider co-operative movement, including:

- Membership engagement
- Recruitment and workforce development
- Education and training
- Community engagement
- Organisational culture

The process of reflection, something this guidance encourages, applies to all sizes and scales of co-op. The guidance offers a broader framework for embedding inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional approaches throughout co-operative practice. Following this guidance will help to ensure that democratic and participatory values are reflected not only in how co-operatives are governed, but also in how they operate, grow and engage with the people and communities they serve.

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About this resource

This resource was commissioned by Co-operatives UK's Co-operative Governance Expert Reference Panel. It was produced by Mya Badhan, Member of the Youth Advisory Group and observer of the Co-operative Governance Expert Reference Panel.

1. Reflect

1.1 Examining the complexities of modern co-operative governance

Governance is the framework through which organisations are directed, controlled and held accountable. Within co-operatives, governance is closely connected to democratic participation, collective ownership and social responsibility. Boards are responsible not only for organisational oversight and strategic direction but also for ensuring that governance remains connected and accountable to the diverse memberships and communities co-operatives exist to serve. Governance therefore shapes not only how decisions are made, but also whose voices influence organisational direction and how accountability to members and communities is maintained over time.

While governance is often associated with formal structures, policies and compliance processes, participation is also shaped by governance culture, including behaviours, relationships, communication styles and informal power dynamics within board environments.

Importantly, boards do not operate separately from wider society, and governance environments can reflect broader social norms, assumptions and inequalities. This can include

- Unequal access to power
- Professional gatekeeping
- Age-based assumptions about competence and authority
- Expectations around confidence, language and prior experience

These repeated norms can become embedded within governance structures, behaviours and cultures, shaping who feels able to participate, whose contributions are recognised, and whose voices carry influence. As a result, governance spaces can become more accessible to those already familiar with established leadership environments, while creating barriers for others.

The governance culture of UK co-operatives is also shaped by the wider legal and economic environment in which they operate. Unlike some European countries, the UK does not provide distinct legal frameworks for different co-operative forms, and co-operatives often operate within regulatory and financial systems primarily designed around investor-owned business models. Historically, the UK co-operative sector has also experienced periods of demutualisation, consolidation and legislative neglect, contributing to a comparatively smaller co-operative sector than in some other countries.

In this context, co-operative boards may place significant emphasis on continuity, organisational stability, professional expertise and institutional memory. While these priorities can support resilience and long-term sustainability, they may also unintentionally reinforce governance cultures that favour familiarity, established networks and traditional leadership norms over broader participation and renewal.

1.2 What are the 3 ‘ins’ of good governance and why do they matter?

The three ‘ins’ of good governance – inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance – should be understood not only as aspirations, but as pathways to stronger governance. They encourage boards to look beyond representation alone and reflect on how wider institutional pressures, governance cultures and inherited practices shape participation, legitimacy and influence. In doing so, they help create the conditions through which different forms of experience, knowledge and leadership can contribute meaningfully to collective decision-making.

1. Inclusive governance

Inclusive governance refers to governance cultures and practices that enable people with different experiences, identities and perspectives to participate meaningfully and influence decision-making effectively. This includes considering how participation and influence are influence are shaped through:

- Recruitment
- Onboarding
- Meeting structures
- Communications
- Board behaviours
- Informal power dynamics

Inclusive governance recognises that effective boards benefit from a broad range of skills, experiences and lived realities. It therefore focuses not only on who is present, but also on whether individuals are able to contribute confidently, be heard and exercise influence within governance processes.

2. Intergenerational governance

Intergenerational governance refers to governance environments in which people from different age groups and life stages participate together in leadership and decision-making. An intergenerational approach recognises the value of balancing institutional memory, experience and continuity with contemporary perspectives, emerging knowledge and lived realities across generations.

For co-operatives, intergenerational governance can help boards remain connected to changing memberships, communities and social contexts while maintaining the organisational knowledge and experience needed for long-term stewardship.

3. Intersectional governance

Intersectional governance recognises that experiences of participation, exclusion and influence are shaped by multiple overlapping aspects of identity and social position. These may include age, race, gender, disability, class, sexuality, religion, caring responsibilities, education, income, geography and access to social or professional networks.

Barriers to governance participation are therefore not experienced equally. Individuals may face multiple and compounding barriers that affect their ability to access governance opportunities, participate confidently or influence decision-making.

An intersectional approach encourages boards to recognise this complexity and avoid treating underrepresented groups as homogeneous or experiencing governance in the same way.

Beyond representation

While comprehensive demographic data on co-operative board composition in the UK remains limited, wider governance research suggests that boards across many sectors can be shaped by relatively homogeneous networks, experiences and leadership pathways. This may limit the diversity of perspectives informing governance discussions and decision-making.

However, representation alone does not create inclusive governance. There is also a risk of tokenistic participation, where individuals are included symbolically without meaningful influence, support or opportunities to contribute fully. Presence alone is not participation.

The three 'Ins' therefore represent more than demographic diversity. They are pathways through which boards can create governance environments that support meaningful participation, shared influence and democratic legitimacy. They encourage boards to reflect not only on who is present within governance structures, but also on whose voices are heard, whose participation carries influence and how governance cultures can either enable or restrict meaningful contribution.

1.3 Governance culture, board behaviour and power dynamics

While governance structures may appear formally equal, participation is often shaped by less visible factors, including board culture, institutional memory, informal power and established patterns of interaction. These dynamics influence who feels able to contribute, whose perspectives are recognised and how decisions are ultimately made.

Understanding and reflecting on these dynamics is an important part of effective governance:

- Governance culture refers to the behaviours, relationships, expectations and participation norms that shape how governance operates in practice. Board culture influences how discussions are conducted, how challenge is received, how decisions are reached and whose contributions are valued.
- Institutional memory can strengthen governance by providing continuity, organisational knowledge and historical understanding. However, where established practices and assumptions go unexamined, they can unintentionally limit opportunities for new perspectives and emerging forms of expertise to influence governance discussions.
- Informal power exists alongside formal governance structures and may arise through length of service, familiarity with governance processes, professional background, established relationships or perceived expertise. These dynamics can affect whose opinions carry influence and how decisions are shaped.
- Board dynamics also influence participation. For many people, joining a board means entering an established environment with its own language, relationships and expectations. As a result, participation may depend not only on individual confidence or capability, but also on whether governance cultures create space for people to contribute meaningfully.
- Psychological safety is key for effective governance, an environment in which directors feel able to ask questions, express uncertainty, offer challenges and contribute differing perspectives without fear of dismissal or personal criticism. Psychological safety does not remove accountability or robust debate; rather, it enables constructive challenge and supports better decision-making.

Boards should therefore examine not only who is present, but whose participation carries influence, and whether governance cultures support broad, meaningful and equitable participation in decision-making. This reflects the central principle underpinning the three 'Ins' of good governance.

2. Review

2.1 Why some people do not join, stay, or progress in governance

While governance structures may appear formally open and accessible to all members, participation in practice is shaped by a range of structural and cultural factors that influence who is able to join, remain, and progress within board roles.

Barriers do not operate in isolation; rather, they are closely connected and often mutually reinforcing, particularly for individuals experiencing multiple forms of inequality.

Practical barriers such as time, remuneration, accessibility or governance knowledge do not exist separately from governance culture and behaviour. Assumptions about professionalism, competence, confidence or 'fit' can shape how structural barriers are experienced, who feels able to navigate governance environments, and whose participation is supported or valued. As a result, participation in governance is influenced not only by formal access, but also by the interaction between organisational systems, board culture and wider social inequalities.

Understanding these barriers is essential to recognising that underrepresentation in governance is not simply a question of interest or capability, but also of access, opportunity, and organisational culture.

Recruitment and representation

The way governance opportunities are advertised, promoted and described can influence who feels encouraged to apply. Recruitment processes may unintentionally reinforce exclusion where governance experience is presented as essential, pathways into governance are unclear, or language assumes familiarity with board environments.

In such contexts, individuals who do not already identify with governance environments may be less likely to see themselves as suitable candidates, even where they have relevant lived experience, insight or transferable skills.

Boards should consider whether vacancies are advertised only through established member and professional networks, or also through wider and more accessible channels, such as member communications, community networks, youth organisations, relevant sector networks and accessible online platforms.

Representation is therefore shaped not only by who applies, but by how accessible and visible the route into governance appears.

Elections and informal bias

In democratically elected governance structures, such as co-operatives, formal equality of opportunity can still be shaped by informal dynamics. Elections may be influenced by familiarity, visibility and recognition, meaning that individuals who are already known within the organisation or wider network may have a structural advantage. This can create a tendency towards 'recognition voting', where existing relationships or reputational familiarity influence outcomes.

As a result:

- Elections may function as popularity contests as well as democratic processes, creating a sense among some members that there is little point in standing when outcomes appear to favour familiar or already-established candidates
- Candidates with existing social capital may be advantaged, and those from underrepresented groups may face additional barriers to being selected or elected
- Where turnout is low, those who are repeatedly elected may come to see their continued election as evidence of a strong democratic mandate or legitimacy, even where only a relatively small proportion of the membership has voted

Without clear support, transparent criteria, and active encouragement, electoral processes may therefore reproduce existing governance demographics rather than broaden participation.

Accessibility, onboarding, retention

Practical barriers can significantly affect who is able to participate in governance. These may include meeting times, caring responsibilities, remuneration, accessibility needs, digital access, governance language and the availability of clear information.

Effective onboarding is equally important. New directors are more likely to participate confidently where they receive a structured induction, opportunities to build relationships, clear role expectations and accessible governance materials. Co-operatives UK's Induction Checklist lays the foundation for effective onboarding.

Crucially, barriers do not end once someone joins a board. Participation, confidence and progression are often shaped by access to informal networks, opportunities to develop governance knowledge and the extent to which individuals feel welcomed, valued and able to contribute.

Boards that focus only on recruitment may improve representation without improving inclusion. Effective governance requires attention to the full participation journey, from initial engagement through to meaningful contribution, retention and progression into leadership roles.

Intersectional barriers

Barriers to participation are not experienced equally. Factors such as age, disability, race, gender, class, caring responsibilities, education and income can interact to create different experiences of governance access and participation. Boards should therefore avoid treating underrepresentation as uniform and instead recognise how overlapping factors affect governance access, confidence, and influence.

Boards should recognise that legitimacy is shaped socially as well as formally. Holding a board position does not automatically guarantee that all directors experience equal confidence, influence or participation within governance discussions. For example, neurodivergent people may find some of the more 'natural' or informal routes into relationships, networks and shared understanding harder to access, particularly where expectations are implicit rather than clearly communicated. Please see Co-operatives UK's Neurodiversity in the Boardroom guidance for more information.

3. Strengthen

3.1 Participation, inclusion and influence

Striving for the "3 ins" of good governance is not achieved through representation alone. The presence of people from underrepresented groups does not automatically result in meaningful participation, shared influence, or equitable decision-making power.

Presence alone is not participation.

Within co-operatives, this distinction is critical because governance legitimacy depends on democratic participation and member voice. Where influence remains concentrated among established groups, governance may appear representative while remaining unequal in practice. Inclusive governance requires attention to how participation, influence, and decision-making are experienced in practice.

Enabling meaningful participation

Boards should ensure governance cultures:

- Distribute influence more equitably
  - Ensure that decision-making is not consistently shaped by the same individuals or groups, and by creating opportunities for all directors to influence discussion and outcomes.
- Support learning and development over time
  - Recognise that directors may develop confidence, governance knowledge and understanding through experience, mentoring, participation in committees and involvement in strategic discussions, rather than expecting everyone to arrive with the same level of prior knowledge.
- Enable diverse perspectives to shape decisions
  - Actively invite different experiences and viewpoints into discussions and ensure that contributions are considered when decisions are made, rather than simply seeking representation without influence.
- Reduce reliance on informal networks and established norms
  - Make information, expectations and opportunities available through formal and transparent routes rather than relying on existing relationships, informal conversations or an assumption that new directors will learn how things work by observing others.

In practice, this may involve:

- Creating clear opportunities for contribution during meetings
  - Use structured rounds of discussion, inviting views before decisions are taken, or making space for questions and reflection.
- Actively encouraging quieter voices into discussion
  - Particularly where some directors are less likely to interrupt or speak early in a discussion, ensuring that participation does not depend solely on confidence or assertiveness.
- Ensuring challenge is welcomed rather than personalised
  - Create a culture where directors can question assumptions, raise concerns or disagree

with proposals without this being interpreted as criticism of individuals.
- Recognising different communication styles and forms of participation
    - Allow appropriate time to reflect on complex issues, recognising that some people may contribute more effectively in writing, and avoiding assumptions that confidence or speed of response indicate greater competence.

Boards should recognise that confidence and contribution are often shaped by environments rather than personality alone. Governance cultures that favour speed, familiarity, assertiveness or established relationships may unintentionally advantage some participants over others.

Structural inclusion and shared power

Inclusion must be both structural and cultural. Boards should consider how decision-making power is distributed and whether governance pathways enable participation and progression.

Participation routes such as observer roles, advisory groups, committees, or co-option can support inclusion, but only where they are meaningful, connected to decision-making, and developmental, not symbolic or permanent parallel structures.

For example:

- Observers should have opportunities to learn, contribute, and progress
- Advisory input should clearly shape decisions
- Co-option should not create second-tier participation

Without real influence, these pathways risk reinforcing exclusion.

Psychological safety and challenge culture

Inclusive governance depends on psychological safety: environments where people can speak openly without fear of dismissal or negative consequences.

This enables:

- Questions and learning
- Constructive disagreement
- Challenge to assumptions
- Diverse perspectives in decision-making

Without psychological safety, participation becomes limited, especially for newer or underrepresented members. Boards should foster a culture of *'check and challenge, not criticism'*, where disagreement is expected, not discouraged, and handled respectfully.

Encouraging participation and development

Governance capability develops through experience, support, and exposure to governance practice.

Boards should enable development through:

- Induction and onboarding
- Mentoring and peer support
- Participation in committees and discussions

- Access to governance learning opportunities

Prior experience should not be treated as a prerequisite for contribution. Many individuals bring transferable skills from community leadership, employment, volunteering, activism, education, and lived experience.

Inclusive governance strengthens effectiveness by widening participation and perspectives.

3.2 Leadership: Chairs, secretaries and shared responsibility

Inclusive governance is actively shaped by leadership behaviours.

The chair

The chair shapes participation through facilitation, not just procedure.

Effective chairs:

- Balance participation across the board
  - Ensuring that discussion does not consistently centre on the most experienced or confident directors and creating opportunities for newer directors to contribute.
- Ensure all perspectives are heard
  - Actively inviting views that may not yet have been expressed, particularly where discussion appears to be moving quickly towards consensus.
- Encourage constructive challenge
  - Making clear that questioning proposals, testing assumptions and offering alternative perspectives are legitimate and necessary parts of effective governance.
- Manage disagreement fairly
  - Distinguishing between robust disagreement about an issue and personal criticism, and ensuring that differences of view are handled respectfully.
- Prevent dominance by individuals or groups
  - Managing interruptions, repeated contributions or situations where particular voices consistently carry greater weight.

The chair enables collective decision-making rather than directing outcomes.

The secretary

The secretary supports accessibility, clarity, and fairness by ensuring governance processes are transparent and understandable.

This includes:

- Clear roles and responsibilities
  - Ensuring directors understand what is expected of them and how responsibilities and decision-making authority are distributed.
- Accessible governance materials
  - Using clear language, explaining terminology and providing sufficient context so that directors are not dependent on prior governance experience to understand board papers.
- Transparent election processes
  - Ensuring information about vacancies, eligibility, nomination processes and elections is

communicated clearly and through accessible routes.

- Structured induction and onboarding
  - Providing new directors with the information, relationships and practical support they need to understand both formal governance processes and the culture in which they will be participating.

This reduces reliance on informal knowledge or networks.

Shared leadership & reflective practice

Inclusive governance is a shared leadership responsibility across the board.

Boards should ensure governance practice enables:

- Openness to new and diverse perspectives
- Constructive challenge
- Participation from underrepresented groups
- Ongoing renewal of governance culture

This requires attention to how power operates, including informal norms and behaviours that may unintentionally exclude participation.

Boards should therefore regularly reflect on:

- Who speaks and who influences decisions
- How meetings are facilitated
- How disagreement is managed
- Whether participation is genuinely inclusive

Inclusive governance is not a fixed outcome, but an ongoing process of reflection, adaptation, and improvement.

4. Create

4.1 Building pathways into governance

Democratic, effective and future-focused governance requires intentional, structured pathways that support intergenerational, intersectional and inclusive participation in governance over time

Governance participation should be understood as *developmental*, not something individuals are expected to be fully prepared for at the point of appointment. Confidence, understanding, and influence are built gradually through exposure, support, learning, and relationships.

4.2 Participation pathways and progression routes

Creating clear and accessible pathways into governance is essential to strengthening co-operative democracy by widening participation and building long-term governance capacity within the organisation. They are particularly important for enabling people who may not traditionally see themselves represented in governance spaces to begin engaging in ways that feel tangible and supported.

Participation pathways may include:

- Observer roles
- Youth boards
- Advisory or reference groups
- Committee membership
- Co-option arrangements
- Shadowing opportunities
- Member engagement or development structures

These should function as *progressive entry points*, enabling members, or even customers, to move from involvement to influence and, where appropriate, full governance participation.

Effective pathways:

- Support intergenerational participation
- Reduce intersectional barriers
- Enable inclusive participation and belonging
- Create clear routes into governance roles

The purpose of participation pathways is not to create parallel or permanent structures, but to act as developmental routes into governance involvement and contribution, supporting members to build readiness, relationships, and confidence over time. When designed well, these pathways help ensure that governance participation is broadened, sustained, and reflective of the diversity of the co-operative membership.

Induction and onboarding

Induction is a key entry point for involvement and inclusion, and should be understood as a practical, relational and cultural process. Effective onboarding should support new directors not

only to understand governance structures and responsibilities, but also to build confidence, relationships and familiarity with governance culture and expectations.

- Understand governance roles, responsibilities, and co-operative principles
- Engage confidently in meetings and decision-making
- Build relationships across the board and organisation
- Access accessible, plain-language governance materials
- Understand how influence and decision-making work in practice

Mentoring, buddying and governance learning and development

Governance capability develops over time through a combination of support, relationships, and practical experience, alongside formal learning.

Mentoring and buddying arrangements play a key role in supporting participation by helping newer directors build confidence, ask questions, and develop understanding of governance practice.

These arrangements may include:

- Pairing new directors with more experienced board members
- Regular check-ins, particularly during the first year
- Structured reflection and feedback opportunities
- Informal discussion of governance expectations and processes

Effective support is collaborative rather than hierarchical, with clear expectations and time intentionally allocated. Boards should also recognise that support needs evolve over time, and that ongoing development, reflection, and feedback are important beyond initial onboarding.

Alongside relational support, boards should ensure access to governance learning and development opportunities, including:

- Governance training and skills development
- Participation in committees and working groups
- Involvement in strategic discussions and decision-making
- Progressive exposure to governance responsibilities

Participation pathways should not depend on prior governance experience or professional background. Individuals often bring valuable transferable skills gained through external employment, community leadership, volunteering, education, lived experience, or other organisational involvement. Recognising and valuing these transferable skills helps widen access to governance and supports more inclusive, developmental participation pathways.

Succession, renewal and pipeline development

Sustaining co-operative democracy requires active development of future governance participation across generations and communities.

Boards should consider how they:

- Engage younger members and future co-operative leaders
- Ensure participation from underrepresented and marginalised groups
- Build partnerships with community, education, and youth organisations
- Increase visibility and understanding of governance roles

Inclusive governance must be visible, accessible, and understandable if it is to be genuinely intergenerational and intersectional.

Similarly, succession planning should be a core governance function. This includes looking ahead to the future composition and leadership needs of the board, identifying where new skills, perspectives or experience may be needed, and creating opportunities for people to develop towards governance and leadership roles before vacancies arise.

Planning leadership transitions over time therefore means thinking beyond the immediate replacement of a Chair, committee lead or director and considering how knowledge, responsibility and leadership can be transferred gradually and effectively.

This includes:

- Reviewing board composition and future capability needs
  - Considering what skills, experience, community connections or perspectives the board will need over the next three to five years as the organisation's strategy, membership or operating environment changes.
- Identifying underrepresented perspectives across age, identity, and experience
  - Considering who's not in the room, or who is currently missing from board discussions.
- Supporting development routes into governance
  - Using youth boards, committee membership, shadowing, mentoring, advisory groups or governance development programmes to give potential future directors opportunities to build knowledge, relationships and confidence.
- Planning leadership transitions over time
  - Identifying potential future Chairs or committee leads, giving them opportunities to develop relevant experience, involving them in leadership responsibilities where appropriate, and ensuring that key organisational knowledge can be transferred before an existing leader steps down.

Inclusive governance also requires boards to actively create space, ensuring that new voices, generations, and perspectives can enter, contribute, and progress.

This may involve:

- Reviewing tenure and rotation practices
  - Considering whether board terms and rotation arrangements provide a healthy balance between retaining institutional memory and creating opportunities for new directors.
- Creating regular opportunities for renewal and progression
  - Reviewing board composition annually and identifying opportunities for people who have developed through committees, youth boards or other participation routes to progress into formal governance roles.
- Sharing leadership roles across the board
  - Creating opportunities for different directors to chair committees, lead particular pieces of work or take on other responsibilities that build leadership experience.

Effective governance balances continuity with renewal, ensuring institutional memory is retained while enabling new perspectives and participation.

5. Conclusion

The 3 ‘ins’ as long-term co-operative practice

Inclusive co-operative governance is not a separate aspect of good governance: it's central to democratic legitimacy and long-term resilience.

The 3 ‘ins’ of democratic, effective and future-focused governance: inclusive, intergenerational, and intersectional governance, should be understood as an ongoing process of reflection, review, strengthening, and creation, rather than a fixed outcome. This process shapes how governance remains open, representative, and responsive.

Strong governance does not treat inclusion, experience, and continuity as competing priorities.

Instead, it balances:

- Intergenerational engagement and learning
- Intersectional understanding of barriers and experience
- Inclusive participation, influence and shared decision-making

Delivering this in practice requires boards to continually:

- Reflect on who participates, whose voices are heard, and how influence operates
- Review governance behaviours, structures, and barriers that shape participation
- Strengthen inclusion, capability and shared power across diverse members
- Create intentional governance pathways that enable involvement, influence, and progression

Effective co-operative governance maintains a dynamic balance between continuity and renewal, accountability and challenge, and established practice and adaptation.

Across this guidance, inclusion has been understood not as representation alone, but as the quality of participation and influence within governance culture and systems. Governance behaviours, structures, and assumptions all shape how the 3 ‘ins’ are experienced in practice.

For co-operatives, this is particularly important because governance legitimacy depends on democratic participation and accountability to members and communities. Inclusive governance strengthens this legitimacy by ensuring governance remains connected to the diversity, experience and lived realities of the membership it serves.

Ultimately, co-operative governance becomes stronger when boards actively engage in the ongoing process of reflecting, reviewing, strengthening, and creating conditions for intergenerational, intersectional and inclusive participation and influence. This is what sustains democratic resilience, deepens member engagement, and ensures governance remains relevant over time.

Appendix A: Reflective practice tools

Reflective practice tools

Inclusive governance requires ongoing reflection rather than one-off interventions. Governance cultures, behaviours and participation patterns develop over time and are often shaped by assumptions, habits and informal dynamics that may not always be immediately visible to boards themselves.

Regular reflective practice can help boards better understand how governance operates in practice, identify barriers to participation and consider whether governance environments support meaningful contribution from a broad range of members and perspectives.

These questions are intended to support reflection, discussion and continuous improvement rather than compliance or performance assessment.

Questions for boards: *Boards may wish to reflect on:*

Governance culture and participation

- Who speaks most frequently during meetings?
- Whose contributions appear to carry the greatest influence?
- Are all directors equally encouraged to participate?
- How are interruptions, disagreement and challenge managed?
- Do newer directors feel able to contribute openly and confidently?
- What informal behaviours or norms shape participation within meetings?

Boards should consider not only who is present within governance spaces, but how participation and influence are distributed in practice.

Assumptions, legitimacy and experience

- What assumptions do we make about “experience,” professionalism or governance readiness?
- How do we define leadership, competence or credibility?
- Are some forms of experience valued more highly than others?
- How might age, background, confidence or communication style shape perceptions of legitimacy?
- Are there individuals or groups who may feel pressure to overperform in order to be heard or taken seriously?

These questions can help boards examine how wider social assumptions and governance norms may influence participation and decision-making.

Influence, decision-making and power

- How are decisions shaped before, during and after meetings?
- Are some individuals more influential due to length of service, confidence or existing relationships?
- How does the board respond to challenge or disagreement?

- Are quieter voices actively encouraged into discussion?
- Does participation lead to meaningful influence, or primarily attendance and observation?

Boards should recognise that influence may operate informally as well as formally within governance environments.

Renewal, representation and future governance

- What perspectives or lived experiences may currently be missing from governance discussions?
- Does the board reflect the diversity of its membership and communities?
- How are future directors identified, developed and supported?
- Are governance pathways visible and accessible to a broad range of members?
- How does the board balance continuity, institutional memory and renewal?

Reflective governance involves recognising both strengths and gaps within existing governance cultures and structures.

Using reflective practice

Boards may wish to use these questions:

- During board reviews or evaluations
- As part of governance effectiveness discussions
- Within board development sessions
- During recruitment or succession planning
- Or as part of wider organisational reflection on participation and accountability

The purpose is not to produce perfect governance cultures, but to support ongoing learning, reflection and improvement over time.

Appendix B: Using the guidance in practice

Using the guidance in practice

Purpose

This interactive session will explore what inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance looks like in practice. Participants will reflect on their own experiences, share what their co-operatives are currently doing, identify what is working and where barriers remain, and use *The "3 ins" of good governance: Inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance* guidance to identify practical ways to strengthen participation and progression.

Session outcomes

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- Reflected on what the three 'ins' of good governance means in practice
- Identified examples of good practice and areas where participation could be improved
- Explored where people may become excluded or get stuck on the pathway into governance
- Considered practical actions that could strengthen inclusive and intergenerational governance
- Identified how the guidance can be used as a practical tool within their own co-operative

Agenda

5 mins: Welcome and reflect

- Facilitators introduce the session and explain why inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional governance matters.
- Opening prompt: Discuss your first governance role or governance experience
  - What helped you get involved?
- *Facilitator note: Connect participants' own experiences to the themes in the guidance (i.e. board culture, onboarding, role of the chair)*

15 mins: Spectrum activity: How inclusive is our governance?

- Participants position themselves along a Strongly Agree ←→ Strongly Disagree spectrum in response to each statement.
- After each statement, discuss:
  - Why are you standing there?
  - What experiences shape your view?
- *Facilitator Note: Explore different experiences of governance participation and make informal barriers and differences in experience visible.*
- Statements:
  - Young people or those traditionally underrepresented in our sector can easily access governance opportunities in my co-operative.
  - Once people join governance, they have equal opportunity to influence decisions.
  - We have clear pathways into governance for members.
  - Our governance culture actively supports new voices.

- After this exercise, please discuss the following:
  - What surprised you?
  - Where was there the most disagreement?
  - What does this tell us about participation in governance?

15 mins: Sharing and practice exchange

- Each participant identifies one example of good practice and one challenge in how governance currently operates in their organisation.
- Facilitators move around the room to draw out examples and map what members are already doing and identify where further support or resources may be useful.
- Prompts
  - What are you currently doing that helps people get involved in governance?
  - What has worked particularly well?
  - What barriers still exist?
  - What supported participation?
  - What made participation difficult?
  - What does genuinely inclusive governance look like in practice?

20 mins: Group challenge: Mapping pathways into governance

- As a group, map a governance journey on a whiteboard or piece of paper: USER/CUSTOMER (if applicable) → MEMBER → INTERESTED MEMBER → FIRST GOVERNANCE ROLE → ACTIVE PARTICIPANT → LEADERSHIP ROLE.
- *Facilitator Note: At each stage ask:*
  - *Where do people get stuck?*
  - *Who is most likely to be excluded?*
  - *What would make progression easier?*
  - *Apply the guidance's focus on creating pathways into governance and progression over time.*
    - Prompts can include:
      - Communication
      - Confidence
      - Governance knowledge
      - Chairing/Facilitation
      - Induction
      - Mentoring
      - Accessibility
      - Representation
      - Identify practical interventions that can make progression more inclusive.

5 mins: Closing: reflect, review, strengthen, create

- Ask participants to identify one practical action for each stage of the guidance:
  - Reflect: What is one thing your co-operative should continue doing?
  - Review: What is one thing your co-operative should rethink or do differently?
  - Strengthen: What is one area your co-operative should develop or make stronger?
  - Create: What is one new practice, approach or initiative your co-operative could introduce?
- *Facilitator Note: Turn discussion into practical next steps and encourage participants to use the guidance after the session.*

Using the guidance during the session

The guidance should be introduced as a practical tool for reflection and action, rather than as a presentation to be worked through.

Facilitators can refer participants to four areas:

1. Reflect: How does governance work in practice? Use the guidance to consider governance culture, informal power, participation and whose voices influence decisions.
2. Review: What might be creating barriers? Use the guidance to explore recruitment, accessibility, onboarding, informal networks, confidence, governance knowledge and other factors that affect who joins, stays and progresses.
3. Strengthen: What can we do differently to improve participation and influence? Use the guidance to move from identifying barriers to considering how current governance practice, behaviours and structures could be made more consistent, accessible or effective, as well as where a different approach may be needed. This might include considering facilitation styles, creating clearer opportunities for contribution, or providing better opportunities for learning, mentoring and development.
4. Create: What pathways could enhance participation and progression? Use the guidance to consider practical routes into governance, including committees, advisory groups, shadowing, mentoring, youth boards and other developmental opportunities.

Call to action

Participants should leave with a clear invitation to use the guidance within their own co-operative:

- Reflect on what you are currently doing.
- Review what is and isn't working.
- Then use the guidance to identify what you could strengthen, introduce or change.

The session also provides an opportunity to identify where members need additional resources, information or support to put the guidance into practice.

Appendix C: References

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https://www.uk.coop/resources/inclusive-intergenerational-and-intersectional-governance

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