**Canvassing Code of Conduct**

Co-operatives are member-owned and controlled democratic organisations that should promote a vibrant democracy that encourages active, democratic member participation.

Election processes should be formal and transparent and ensure that the democratic rights of members are exercised.

This Code of Conduct is designed to set out the rules relating to canvassing activity permitted during an election cycle and provides information for candidates and also directors, officers, management and other employees and stakeholders of our Co-operative. The primary aim of this Code of Conduct is to ensure our Co-operative’s elections are conducted in a positive spirit in the interest of both candidates and members alike.

In this Code of Conduct, canvassing means the systematic initiation of direct contact with members of our Co-operative with a view to soliciting their vote in an election.

Canvassing is permitted by our Co-operative provided that this Code of Conduct is followed. Any breach of this Code of Conduct may invalidate the candidate’s nomination, or their position on the Board if the breach occurs, or is reported, after a successful election (provided this is permitted by our Co-operative’s Rules). The decision as to whether a candidate’s nomination, or election, is revoked shall be made by the returning officer following an investigation.

In the conduct of elections and the interpretation of this Code of Conduct, the Secretary of our Co-operative shall be the returning officer, whose decision shall be final. If a candidate is unsure whether a specific canvassing activity is permitted under this Code, they must seek the view of the returning officer prior to undertaking such activity and must abide by the returning officer’s decision.

1. Elections shall be undertaken in accordance with our Co-operative’s Rules.
2. Elections should be open – with members having information which helps them to decide who to vote for – and fair to candidates. Candidates will be asked to provide appropriate information to our Co-operative to be circulated to members prior to and during the voting period.
3. Any canvassing activity, including canvassing materials, shall be undertaken in a manner that, at all times:
	* Is fair and transparent
	* Is respectful and not critical of other candidates or our Co-operative
	* Is not calling for voters to boycott or actively vote against another candidate
	* Is positive
	* Is not untrue or misleading
	* Is not damaging to the Co-operative’s reputation
	* Role models the Co-operative’s expected behaviours and values.
	* Does not exert pressure on any person to act or vote in a particular way, including through payment or giving gifts or hospitality in return for votes.
4. Once the voting period for an election has begun, candidates may canvas their **own** contacts for support in person, by post, telephone, email or using their own personal social media accounts, with the following exceptions:
	* No canvassing, or the distribution of canvassing material, by or in support of candidates is permitted on any of our Co-operative’s premises, or using our Co-operative equipment or resources, including social media accounts run or endorsed by our Co-operative.
	* Candidates should only use their personal contact lists for canvassing activity, no contact lists, membership data or social media accounts held by our Co-operative may be accessed.
	* Candidates should not ask managers in our Co-operative’s stores/premises or any of our colleagues to promote their candidature.
	* Candidates are prohibited from the taking and/or use of images (including photographs) of our Co-operative’s colleagues and/or customers in order to promote their candidature.
	* Candidates should not canvass votes, or request any person to solicit or canvass votes on their behalf, in the immediate vicinity of the location at which elections will take place on the day of the election.
	* Candidates should not solicit external organisations to endorse them/Organisations that have received funding from our Co-operative within the last 12 months are prohibited from publicly endorsing any candidates.
	* Candidates should not partake in joint canvassing activity with another candidate(s).
	* Placing advertisements in the commercial media by candidates is prohibited.
5. Our Co-operative may vary this Code of Conduct provided that it is done fairly and transparently, and any variations are permitted to all candidates.
6. Board members, collectively and individually, are prohibited from publicly or privately endorsing or providing support to any candidate(s) unless they are Board approved candidates.
7. None of our Co-operative’s management, elected officers, committees or groups supported by the Co-operative may solicit votes in favour of or against any candidates.

**Prepared by Co-operatives UK with oversight from the Co-operative Governance Expert Reference Panel, October 2022.**

So, what does this mean in practice? On the following pages you will find examples of practices that would breach the guidelines. Given that the list is not exhaustive and breaching the guidelines would likely result in your disqualification from the election, if you are in any doubt as to whether something is permissible under the guidelines or not, please contact the returning officer for the election: [insert name and contact details].

**Breach of Canvassing Code example one**

A member of our Youth Co-operators Network wants to promote their board candidacy by posting on the Youth Co-operators Network private Facebook page to encourage other young co-operators to vote for them. As the Facebook page is considered a ‘resource of the Co-operative’ this is not allowed as it would be seen to provide the candidate with an unfair advantage given the Facebook page is only available to Young Co-operators and would give the impression their candidacy was endorsed by the Co-operative.

**Breach of Canvassing Code example two**

A candidate wants to promote their candidacy by posting on our Co‑operative’s Facebook page asking members to vote for them. All candidates are prohibited from using our Co-operative’s social media pages to promote their candidacy as these are considered a ‘resource of the Co-operative’.

**Breach of Canvassing Code example three**

An existing board member who is up for election has a Twitter account, set up with the agreement of our Co-operative, to promote our Co-operative’s activities, and their activity as a director, which people follow to find out about our Co-operative. They use this Twitter account to tell their followers to vote for a particular candidate. As this is not a personal social media account it should not be used to promote any candidacy.

**Breach of Canvassing Code example four**

A candidate wants to promote their candidacy in a local newspaper to raise awareness that they are standing for election. This would be seen to be ‘promoting your nomination in the commercial media’ which is not permissible under the guidelines.

**Breach of Canvassing Code example five**

A candidate asks one of their customer facing colleagues to encourage the customers coming into our Co-operative’s premises to vote for them. Whilst chatting with the customers, who they know well, they encourage them to vote for said candidate in the elections. This is not allowed as they would be bringing their influence to bear on members.

**What is allowed on social media?**

Candidates can promote their candidacy using their own social media accounts/pages. For example:

* A candidate tweets from their own Twitter page promoting their candidacy. They tag the Co-operative’s Twitter page. This is allowed but the Co‑operative will not interact with their tweet (retweet, comment etc) as the Co-operative can’t be seen to be promoting certain candidates over others.
* A candidate posts a story on their personal Instagram account which promotes their candidacy to their followers.